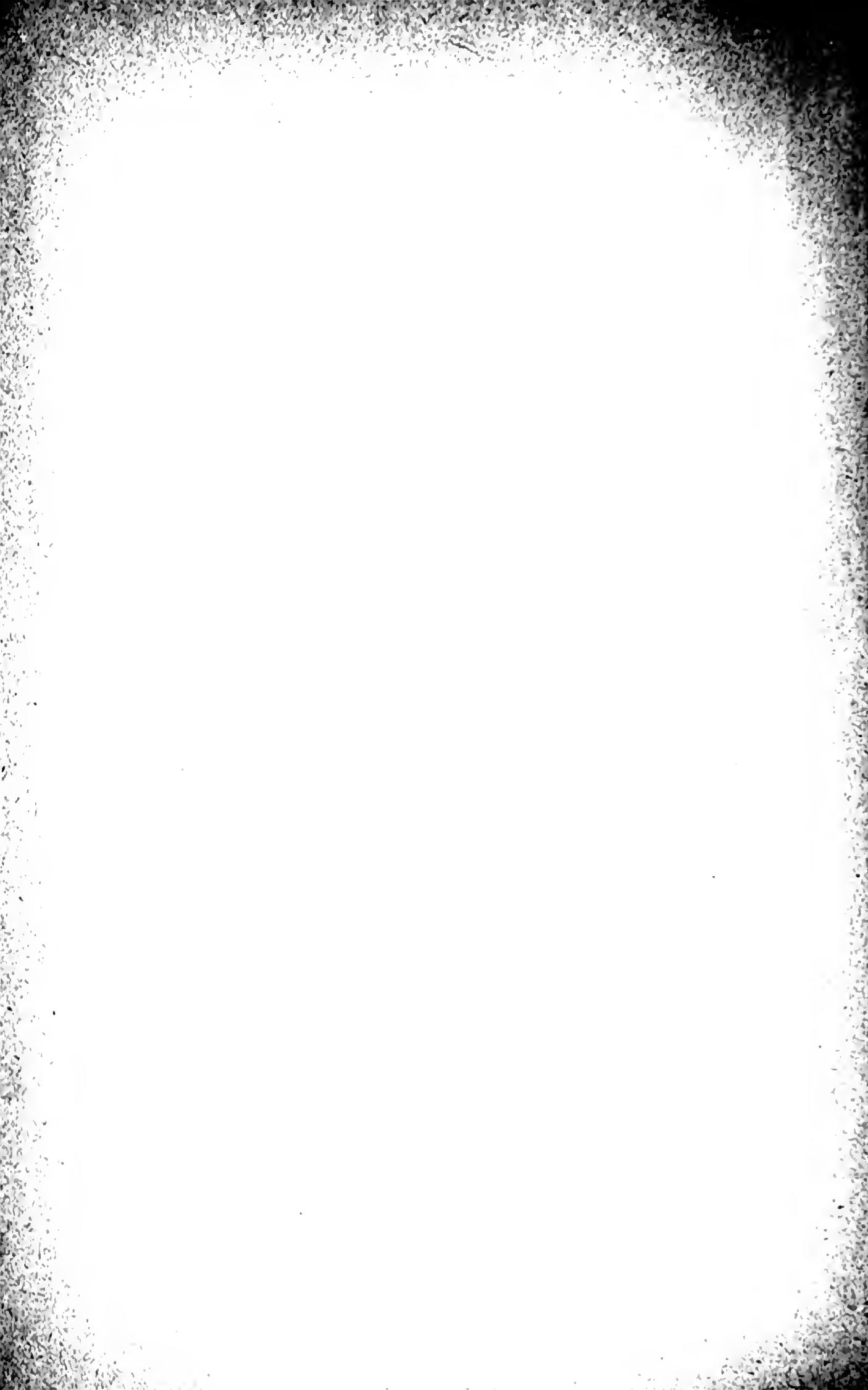


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LOVE THE DEBT

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LOVE THE DEBT

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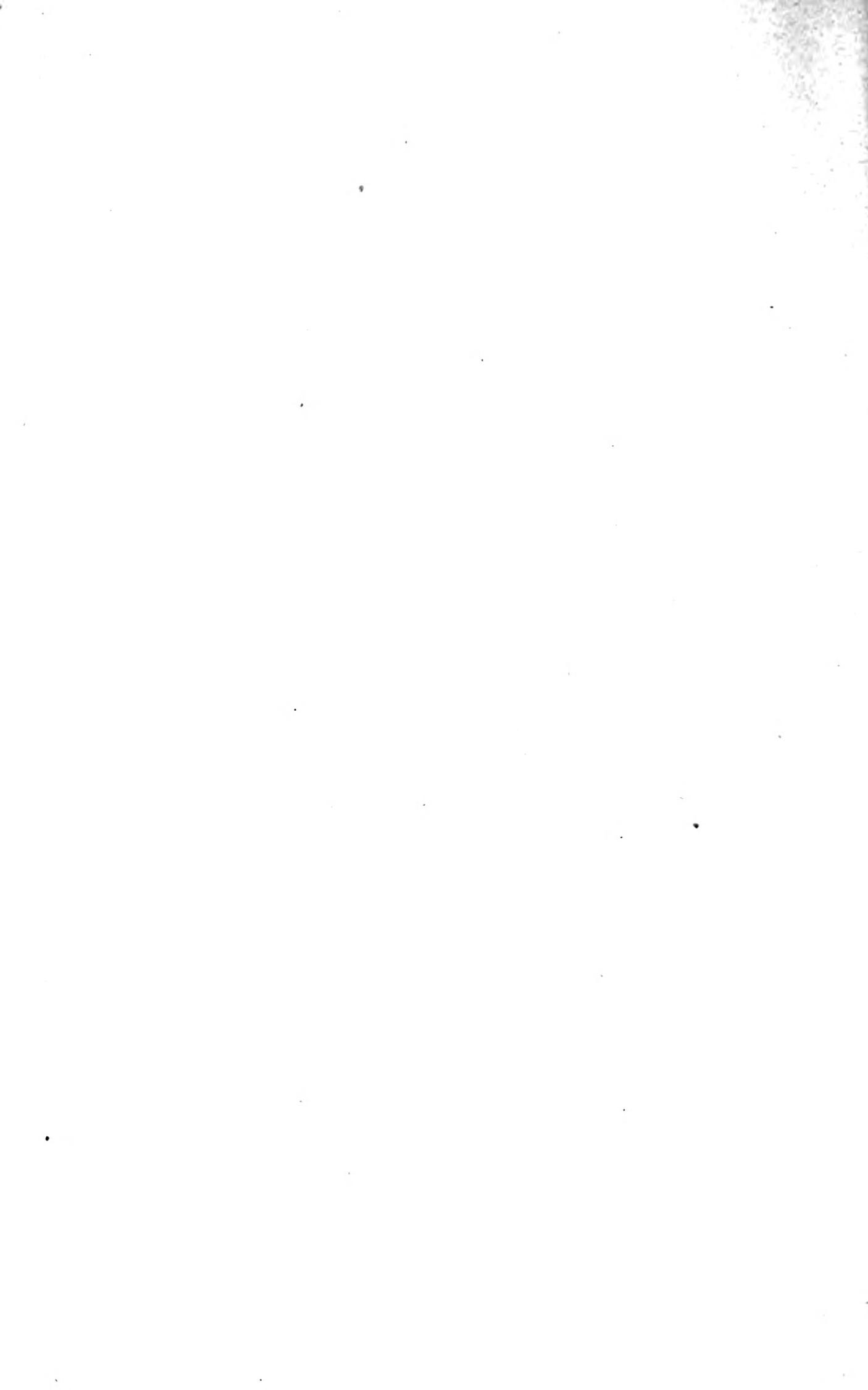
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OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.



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LOVE THE DEBT.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. ROBERT SAGAR.

MABEL felt very nervous as she entered her father's study next morning to read for him, and was not put more at her ease by his paying her the unusual attention of looking at her when she greeted him. Probably the last time he had looked at her with the least attention was when in her childhood he wished to verify in her weeping face the expressions of suffering illustrated by photographs of crying babies in Darwin's 'Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals.' Certainly she had grown since then, and grown into a truly lovely and graceful woman; but her father's only thought as he

looked at her was, 'How old I am getting!' Mabel was to him simply a figure on the dial of life which indicated how far the lengthening shadow had crept insensibly. He was quite angry with her for indicating it so unmistakably, and showed his ill-humour so sharply that Mabel was wretched all through the reading. She of course interpreted his ill-temper to mean disapproval of her engagement. Would he take the matter back into his own hands and break it off? Her suspense during that hour and a half was terrible and intolerable; and when upon her rising to withdraw at its close her father arrested her retreat with a sharp 'Don't go yet,' she was glad to sit down again, as her heart seemed suddenly to stop for a moment.

'I shall be glad if you will give me an additional hour in the day while you are here,' he growled, speaking as if she was on a short visit.

'Yes, father,' was all she trusted herself to say.

'Two hours at each sitting, if it's not too much to ask you.'

'I wish I could be of more use to you, father. If you will also let me come for

another hour in the evening to write for you, I could—'

‘ You left off, I think, at the “ hypothetical imperative.” ’

Mabel, thus ungraciously cut short, resumed her reading. ““ Accordingly the hypothetical imperative only says that the action is good for some purpose *possible* or *actual*. In the first case it is a Problematical, in the second an Assertorial, practical principle. The categorical imperative, which declares an action to be objectively necessary in itself, without reference to any purpose, *i.e.*, without any other end, is valid as an Apodictive principle,”’ etc., etc.

At the close of another half-hour Mabel escaped with a fluttering heart, expecting at each step towards the door to be recalled for sentence. Her father, however, made no further allusion to her engagement. He resented it bitterly, and would gladly have broken it off if his veto would have done it; but he knew so little of his daughter as to imagine that his interference would only precipitate the match. Mabel, on the other hand, knew her father so little as to imagine that consideration for her had something to do with his standing

neutral in a matter of which he evidently disapproved. His evident disapproval, however, was a deep trouble to her, and served the proverbial purpose of alloying her otherwise perfect happiness.

Nulla est sincera voluptas
Sollicitique aliquid lætis intervenit.

As for her aunt's most mournful condolences, which Mabel had next to encounter, they failed of their effect, as their subject was clergymen and matrimony in general, and not the special man and match on which Mabel's heart was set. The old lady always took her breakfast in bed. Only Mabel was allowed to take it to her, and not even Mabel was permitted to see her in dishabille. The breakfast was set out on a little table outside the bed-curtains, which were kept close drawn while Mabel was in the room. She persuaded not merely Mabel, but herself, that it was extreme modesty, not vanity, that would allow no eye to see her till she had given over an hour to her toilet. When Mabel had answered her aunt's breakfast bell this morning, and had entered bearing the tray, Miss Masters greeted her in a mumbling, muffled, and lamentable voice from within the veil. 'Is that you, dear? How are you this morning?'

‘Much better, thank you,’ answered Mabel, laughing. ‘I hope you had a good night, aunt?’

‘That wasn’t to be expected, child. I had a very poor night.’

This meant with Miss Masters a parenthesis of half an hour’s wakefulness interrupting an otherwise sound sleep of nine hours.

‘A very poor night. I was thinking of my old schoolfellow, Mary McAlister. She, too, married a clergyman. He was a widower with seven children. They used to sit in the gallery, and stick pins in the servant, I remember, and he would shake his head at them from the reading-desk. For he was only a curate, you know, and Mary *would* marry him. And then she was always writing letters to get them into one school or another. I had to give up answering them at last, poor thing; and it’s only the other day I saw his death in the paper—“George Kilmore, aged 76, for 23 years vicar of Long Langstaffe.” She will be a clergyman’s widow now. I have always remarked,’ she continued with increased dolefulness, ‘that clergymen have more widows than other professions. Wherever I go I am asked to support a society for the relief of the

widows of the clergy of that diocese. I don't know how it is, I'm sure.'

'Perhaps it's because they have more wives, aunt. You know Mr. Kilmore was married twice.'

'Perhaps so, dear,' said her aunt placidly, completely taken in by this confusion of the Mormon with the Whistonian heresy. 'But there she is, poor thing, a clergyman's widow, now!'

'But *she* may have died first,' suggested Mabel hopefully.

'My dear, she was only five years older than I.'

'Then she's likely to marry again, aunt, and may not be a clergyman's widow after all.'

'If they married again, child, how could there be so many of them?' asked her aunt triumphantly. 'I'm sure I never take up a paper but I read, "The widow of a clergyman is willing to take in two or three children to be educated with her own," or, "The widow of a clergyman would be deeply thankful for twelve postage-stamps to get her orphan child into a Clergy Son's School." It's but a poor prospect,

Mabel, my dear, and I must say I think you would have done better to have refused Mr. Kneeshaw.'

'He didn't ask me to be his widow, aunt.'

'Well, my dear, young people always know best,' said the old lady, somewhat huffed. 'I only hope you'll not regret it. If *I* had accepted the first person that asked me I might have been a clergyman's widow myself to-day.'

The gentleman here described by poetic licence as 'the first person that asked me,' was not a clergyman, but an usher in a school, who hoped one day to be ordained, and had not proposed for Miss Masters, but had shown her what she considered marked attentions, which she thought must have culminated in a proposal if she had not erred on the side of coyness.

'Did you love him, aunt?' asked Mabel, now serious and interested.

'I never permitted myself to love any man. I had too much self-respect,' replied the old lady with much dignity. 'I can truly say that I have never given any man the slightest encouragement, and I never shall—never.'

In the ardour of her heroic resolution, Miss

Masters, forgetting that her hair, teeth, and complexion were on the toilet table, pushed the curtain aside, and presented to Mabel 'a sight to dream of, not to tell.' Mabel, notwithstanding her keen sense of the ridiculous, felt only shocked and sad at the pitiable spectacle, and turned hastily away to busy herself with the breakfast things. The sight, indeed, had the unexpected effect of making her regret her flippant answers, and resolve to be more gentle and considerate with her aunt in the future.

'Here I am chattering away and your breakfast getting cold,' she said, with her back turned to her aunt, who, being extremely short-sighted, flattered herself, as she shot back under shelter, that Mabel had not seen her.

'Bring the table a little nearer, my dear. Thank you, that will do. It's I that have been chattering ; but it's all for your good, child.'

Mabel, on leaving her aunt's room, went straight to her own—and to her glass, for *he* would be here in forty minutes more. Was love making her vain? She looked long in the glass with an expression that was at first pleased, then critical, then dissatisfied. She was not half as pretty as she longed to be, as she

ought to have been for *him*. She smoothed her hair, tried one ribbon after another, till at last, in an outburst of disgust with herself and her silliness, she bundled them one and all away, shut the drawer, and ran down to the drawing-room. Here she walked restlessly about the room, sat down and read a few lines, got up, opened the piano, played a few bars, then turned round upon the piano-stool to look again at the timepiece on the mantelshelf and to compare it with her watch. He would be here in twenty minutes now. He *is* here ! for a loud ring of the bell brought the colour in a flood to her face. In another minute the demure Jane entered bearing a card. Mabel looked at the card, and for a moment her disappointment so filled her mind that the name thereon was unrecognised. Next moment it brought with it a rush of sad and sweet associations. It was her mother's dear old friend who used to write to her from India month after month long letters about her husband (who never wrote himself) and other Indian interests ; who came to see them long ago when they were at Scarborough, and brought sumptuous presents, and made the

week he stayed the happiest in all Mabel's remembrance. It was indeed no other than our chivalrous and facetious old friend, Bob Sagar, to whose considerate intervention Mabel owed her being sent home in her infancy with her mother to be brought up in England. He was himself now home for good, and had not been many months in England before he bethought him to look up the daughter of his old friend. He had reached Wefton the night before, had stayed at the 'Queen's,' and had come on to call next morning at this Indian and unearthly hour. And now, following close upon his card, he filled the doorway, 'a good portly man, i' faith, and a corpulent, of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and most noble carriage.' He was advancing into the room with his usual free foot, when the sight of Mabel coming to meet him stopped him dead short.

'It's—it's not Miss Masters?'

'No, it's Mabel,' said that young lady, blushing and laughing at the expression of amazed admiration in Mr. Sagar's face. 'Have you forgotten Queen Mab?' (the name he christened her in those old Scarborough days,

when she exercised a sweet and absolute tyranny over him).

Mr. Sagar took the little hand offered him, held it in his hesitatingly for a moment, and then bent and kissed it with a real homage, which he laughed off as a burlesque tribute to Her Majesty.

‘The queen has become an empress,’ he said, expressing in looks the surprise at her developed beauty, which his words only suggested, ‘and as an old Indian I’ve come to court to kiss hands.’

This speech was most creditable to his presence of mind, in which, to do him justice, Mr. Sagar was seldom deficient, as he was not in the least prepared for such a development. It seemed but yesterday that this lovely and stately girl had sat on his knee with her head pressed against his shoulder, and both arms clasped about his neck, while he told her terrible stories (not strictly true) of his adventures with tigers and Thugs.

‘I am so glad to see you,’ said Mabel simply, too much moved and pleased to keep up this badinage. ‘I thought I should never see you again.’

Mr. Sagar, who looked little like a saint, was nevertheless canonised in Mabel's mind as her dead mother's ideal of goodness and kindness. Long before Mabel had seen him she had heard so much of him as to have formed an extraordinary, and even extravagant, childish idea of his goodness ; and he still remembered the look of awe with which the little girl regarded him at their first interview. He soon, indeed, squandered this reverence by showing himself, in their games, much more of a child than his old-fashioned playmate ; but he won, in its stead, an enduring affection. He had, however, so little idea of the impression he had made upon the solitary child that he doubted her having the slightest recollection of him, and was touched and surprised by the warmth of his welcome.

‘ I never thought you would have cared to see me again. I began letters to you three or four times, but always tore them up, thinking you had forgotten me.’

‘ I think I know your letters by heart, Mr. Sagar.’

‘ My letters ? ’

‘ Mother, when she was dying, gave them

to me with two or three other things she thought much of. She said I might like to read them when I grew older.' Here Mabel stopped, as her voice was growing unsteady ; but Mr. Sagar did not speak. He was looking away from Mabel, out through the window, with a far-off expression in his dimmed grey eyes. 'There was a half-finished letter to you, dated the day before,' Mabel continued, after a pause ; 'but—but—it was all about me, and I didn't like to part with it. I'm sure you'll forgive me, Mr. Sagar.'

Mr. Sagar was still silent, resolutely mastering an emotion of which he need not have been ashamed. At last he said rather huskily, turning to Mabel, 'She bequeathed you to me in it ? '

'She asked you to be to me what you were to her. I have the letter here,' she said, taking out a morocco case, in which she carried always about with her this last letter and two or three other relics of her mother. 'It's yours, Mr. Sagar ; but I hope you will let me keep it.'

He didn't answer at once, but took, with a hand that trembled a little, the folded sheet of

foreign paper, opened it reverently, and read the faded, blotted, tremulous, and uncertain writing :—

‘Dear Friend,—When I wrote last I was in great trouble. My little Mabel was very ill in scarlatina ; but it has pleased God to give her back to my prayers. Still I have only sad news. I am very ill myself—I think, dying ; indeed, the doctor just now almost said as much. What shall I do ? What is to become of my little girl ? I ought to thank you with my last breath for all you have been to me ; but I cannot think of anything but my child. I cannot think of God as I ought. Oh, it is cruel ! I don’t know what I say ! Dear, true friend, you will be to her what you have been to me—what you have been to me. She is not like other children ; she will *die* without love. You will let her love you. You will write to her every month, and come to see her when you are in England. She loves you next to me in the world. She has no one else to love, and oh, she will die without some one to love ! Her father is so taken up— My darling, you mustn’t cry, and you must be very still and patient. Your father will come to

love you in time, and there is always God, always God——'

Here the letter broke off, the writer, wandering through weakness, addressing her child in the last sentence. The nurse put away the half-finished letter into the desk, and here Mabel found it a month after her mother was buried. It was holy to her as her mother's last words ; for, though she lived over another day, she never recovered consciousness. Mabel, child as she was, felt that she ought to have forwarded the letter to Mr. Sagar ; and, indeed, did enclose it in a note to him, but took it out again at the last moment, and re-wrote her note, saying in it that her mother had left a half-finished letter to him, of which she enclosed a copy.

Mr. Sagar had turned away to the window, with his back to Mabel, to read the letter, and still stood turned away from her for a minute after he had read it, and even when he at last broke silence.

‘It was my letter,’ he said, in a voice that shook a little. ‘You should have sent it to me. I should have let you had it back.’

‘I wrote to tell you about it, enclosing a

copy of it ; but father threw the letter in the fire. He said you had forgotten my existence.

Mr. Sagar, listening still to the dead voice, hardly seemed to hear Mabel's apology. He slowly re-read the letter, blurred now with the tears of a third sorrow ; then folded it reverently, as a man covers with the facecloth the features of his dead, and handed it back to Mabel.

‘She did leave you to me, Mabel, and you robbed me of the legacy,’ he said with a sad smile. ‘It might have been so different. I should have had some one to care for, and to care for me, perhaps, all these years. You can do without me now.’

‘I have never done without you, Mr. Sagar. Next to my mother you have been most in my mind. I remember distinctly every day of that week in Scarborough, and every game we played, and every story you told ; and I think I could say by heart all your letters to my mother.’

Mr. Sagar could not help thinking how lonely and like his own must have been the life of which these thin shadows were the dearest companions. ‘It might have been so different,

he said again, answering rather his thoughts than her words. 'But it's too late now. Somebody will come soon who will be everything to you—— Come already,' he muttered, as the door opened and George entered, and Mabel, all blushes and brightness, advanced to meet him. There could be no mistake about it; and Mr. Sagar felt unreasonably bitter when he rose to go within a decent interval after his introduction to Mr. Kneeshaw.

'Are you going, Mr. Sagar?'

'Yes; I have to catch the 11.30 for town.'

'Not away altogether?' exclaimed Mabel in a tone of unmistakable distress.

'I only came to satisfy myself that you were well and happy, and I am quite satisfied.'

'I shall not be happy if—— But you are not *really* going?' with such a pained expression in her voice, and in her face, as Mr. Sagar was the last man in the world to withstand.

'Of course I shall stay if your majesty commands me,' he said, smiling and bowing, thoroughly ashamed of his childish outburst of spleen. 'I have not forgotten my old allegiance.'

'But you didn't really mean to go?' per-

sisted Mabel, naturally quite perplexed by the seeming sudden change in her old friend.

‘Oh, I should have come again after another ten years,’ he replied, somewhat embarrassed for an answer. ‘Rip Van Winkle, you know. It is a lonely *rôle*, and just suits me.’

The words were said in jest; but there was something in the tone that touched and troubled Mabel. ‘It doesn’t suit your friends, though,’ she said sadly; ‘it is enough to have tried them so once.’

‘I don’t deserve to have any,’ he said heartily and sincerely, more and more disgusted with himself. ‘I may come again to-morrow?’

‘You must come again this evening, and see aunt and—and my father. I have so much still to say to you. No; I shall go down with you. Mr. Kneeshaw will excuse me for a moment.’

As they went down the stairs together Mr. Sagar thought he might venture to ascertain the truth of the suspicion which made him so morose for the moment. ‘It *was* a *levee*, then, this morning, Queen Mab? He came to court, eh?’ pointing upwards to the room in which

they had left George. There was not only no possibility of mistaking, but no possibility of pretending to mistake, Mr. Sagar's expressive pantomime and pun. Facetious flippancy was Mr. Sagar's chief social fault and *forte*; but Mabel was little likely to resent it from him, even when applied to so sacred a subject.

‘We are engaged, Mr. Sagar,’ blushing exceedingly.

‘Long?’

‘Since yesterday.’

There was an awkward silence of a moment as they stood together at the bottom of the stairs, during which Mr. Sagar looked wistfully into Mabel's scarlet face, while she was desperately intent upon smoothing with her foot a rebellious lock upon the mat.

‘Well, God bless you, dear! I hope he deserves you,’ he said at last, as he stooped, kissed her on the forehead, and departed.

Mr. Sagar, as he walked away to his hotel, took himself severely to task for his senseless petulance. What would he have had? When he left the ‘Queen's’ in the morning he really did mean to return to town by the 11.30; for he thought Mabel would have wholly forgotten

him. So far from forgetting him, she had made his mere memory a friend during all those long and lonely years in which he had completely neglected her. And now, when light had come into her life from another quarter, he was—jealous !

The word brought with it ideas and dreams at which Mr. Sagar, albeit not given to blushing, blushed. She was engaged only yesterday. Suppose he had come, as he was within an ace of coming, two months earlier : would he have had a chance ? Pshaw ! the loveliest girl he had ever seen throw herself away on a man twenty-two years her senior, who might be her father !

Mr. Sagar might well blush—a middle-aged bachelor smitten at first sight of a girl in her teens ! But, apart from Mabel's beauty, there is to be said in excuse, first, that Mr. Sagar grew to middle-age in India, where girls, if they do not marry immediately, do not improve in manner, mind, or person ; and, secondly, that Mabel again and again recalled her mother to him, and her mother was his ideal of all that was most winning and worshipful in woman.

‘ You will be to her what you have been to me,’ he muttered, quoting from her last letter. ‘ Always the “ Peri at the gate.” It’s but a poor part ; and poorly I’ve played it, too,’ with a sudden relapse into remorse. As he walked up the steps of the ‘ Queen’s’ he felt terribly ‘ out of it all,’ and realised ruefully the truth of the hackneyed comparison of the world to an inn :—

The world’s an inn, and there, unknown,
I solitary sit me down ;
Many I hear, and some I see—
I, nought to them ; they, nought to me.

CHAPTER XVI.

MISS TUBBS' PETS.

OF the five trustees of St. George's, Mr. James Mills had the most interest and the least voice in the appointment of its first vicar. He alone of the five lived within the new parish and would attend the church ; but this expresses only a small part of his stake in the appointment. Not only his Sunday but his weekday comfort depended upon the choice of his co-trustees—of his co-trustees we say advisedly, for Mr. Mills did not venture even to pretend to have a will of his own in the matter. And it was this very lack of a will of his own that was at the root of the discomfort in store for him in the event of the first vicar being other than he should be. For Mr. James Mills was henpecked—not by his wife, for he was a widower, but by his sister-in-law, Miss Tubbs. It was now over ten years since Miss Tubbs

came on a visit of three weeks to her sister, Mrs. Mills ; ‘ and when goes hence ? ’ Well, life is uncertain ; Mr. Mills may survive her.

Miss Tubbs, even before her sister’s death, bore such ‘ solely sovereign sway and masterdom ’ in Mr. Mills’ house as that her two pugs and her black-and-tan terrier were much better attended to than her little nephews and nieces. So also were their successors, a monkey and a macaw—a perfect devil of a bird which, in its gentler moods, imitated a steam-whistle so admirably as sometimes to mislead the Midland signalman a quarter of a mile off. A month after her sister’s death, however, these two pets were packed off, like their predecessors, at a moment’s notice, and her nephews and nieces reigned in their stead. She petted them in the same maudlin and immoderate way in which she had petted their predecessors, so that they soon came to fill the vacant places respectably, becoming nearly as mischievous as the monkey and nearly as noisy as the macaw. Still Miss Tubbs seemed sometimes to miss her pet pugs also, for she had now much at her table the Rev. Samuel Sherlock, vicar of St. Silas’, and

the Rev. Hickson Gant, senior curate of the parish church. These two gentlemen were recommended to her by something more than their intrinsic merits—by spiritual kinship in fact, as being children of the same mother, the Catholic Church. For Miss Tubbs, on her return from one of her annual visits to London, brought home a gorgeous and complete set of vestments, &c., with her. She had been to an auction with the intention of buying old china, and had bid for as a bargain, and had knocked down to her, some altar-cloths—the work of the deceased spinster whose goods were being sold, put up by the order of her sacrilegious nephew and heir. When Miss Tubbs bid for them she was under the impression that they were designed for secular use, but when she paid for them their sacred purpose was explained to her by the auctioneer. She was naturally a good deal disgusted at first; but, to make the best of a bad bargain, she bought from a sisterhood the complementary vestments and came back to Wefton an advanced ritualist. The next thing to be done was to build a church for her vestments, and it is not at all improbable that she would have bullied the

meek Mr. Mills into this extravagance if it had not happened that Messrs. Gledhill and Matchlock about this time set the project on foot of building and endowing St. George's. Miss Tubbs took it up with extraordinary enthusiasm, got up a bazaar which brought in nearly two thousand pounds, forced Mr. Mills to become a liberal subscriber, and so at last he got thrust upon him the greatness of the trusteeship. Much credit was due to her, but she claimed all. She spoke always of the new church as *hers*, as if she was the undisputed founder and patron ; for she had not the least doubt that the trustees would accept the nominee of *her* nominee, Mr. Mills—that is, of course, her choice as communicated to them through her brother-in-law.

Having, then, provided vestments and a church, the next thing was the choice of a priest. It fell on Mr. Hickson Gant. She could not have done better, for Mr. Gant's ritualism was as soundly based as her own. He loved it for the importance it gave him ; for Mr. Gant's importance, like everything else he called his, was borrowed. He was the merest echo and shadow of a man. The

political opinion he heard from one friend he would retail as his own to the next he met, and would sometimes even produce to you to-day, as his own manufacture, the brilliant paradox you had yourself suggested to him yesterday. Sitting opposite to him at Miss Tubbs' table we have even heard him entertain his fair friend on his left with the remarks he had just overheard from the gentleman who sat next but one to him on his right. Like everyone who lives on borrowed means, too, he was wild and reckless in the expenditure of his loans. He would rattle off volubly sometimes the most idiotic and sometimes the most tremendous opinions without having the faintest idea of their character, and that with such boldness as to impose upon other people besides young ladies ; for he differed from a natural echo in this, that he was always much louder than the original voice, resembling, in fact, rather the reproduction of the voice in the whispering gallery of St. Paul's. This was not the least of his recommendations to Miss Tubbs, who was given to impatience of any other voice than her own or its echo. His fondness for children was another of his recommendations to her. Mr.

Gant detested children, but among his affectations—he was a mere bundle of affectations—he professed an infatuated fondness for children, and Miss Tubbs took him at his word. Her nephews and nieces, as we have said, took the place of her dogs in the house. She so petted them herself and insisted on others so petting them that they became the most maddening little ruffians imaginable. Never, not even in an examination hall, did Mr. Gant undergo more misery than in the nursery of ‘The Elms,’ till at last he could stand it no longer. One day, after lunch, when the vestments, &c., had been examined and admired for the hundredth time, and Mr. Gant was trying to think of some excuse to escape which was not transparent and had not been used before, Miss Tubbs said archly, ‘Now for your romp, Vicar’—in private she always called him ‘Vicar’ by prolepsis—‘your mind has been in the nursery for the last ten minutes’—it had indeed; ‘come along, I like to see you in their midst.’

That was the worst of it; so she did. If she had only cast him into the arena, left him there, and departed, he might have made a little defence or a speedy escape; but she sat

like Nero, with thumbs turned down, while he was tortured and torn to pieces.

‘I couldn’t think of going without seeing the little ones,’ gasped Mr. Gant, with a sickly smile.

The little ones were four in number: Mark, aged twelve; Margaret Maria, better known as ‘Maggot,’ aged nine; Wagstaff Tubbs, or ‘Tubby,’ aged six; and Dicky, or ‘Weenums,’ aged five.

‘That’s Maggot!’ cried Miss Tubbs, quickening her steps as hideous howls of rage tormented the air. ‘Poor child, she’s in some trouble!’

It seems that while Emily, the wretched nursemaid, was seated quite worn out in an arm-chair, Mark, a lad of most precocious and diabolical ingenuity, who will one day invent a gallows, if he’s spared, took off her cap, let down her hair, and, under pretence of plaiting it caressingly, tied it firmly to the chair-back. He then sent Maggot to fling the cap into the fire suddenly in front of Emily, who, starting up instinctively, was nearly scalped. It was a capital joke until Emily, having at last unknotted her hair, boxed Maggot’s ears. Hence the howls.

‘Hush ! Maggot ! What’s the matter ?’ asked Miss Tubbs on entering.

‘She’s b—b—boxed my ears !’ sobbed Maggot, pointing to Emily, with such fire in her eyes as might have scorched up the few tears of fury she had shed.

‘Please, ma’am——’

‘Oh, auntie,’ interrupted Mark, ‘such a lark ! I tied Meely’s hair to the chair-back and Maggot shied her cap into the fire, and Meely jumps up like jack-in-the-box and nearly chucks her head off. Didn’t you, Meely ? Nasty, ill-tempered thing ! You’d like to box my ears, wouldn’t you ? Bah !’ with a horrible grimace, his tongue out, and his thumb to his nose.

Miss Tubbs interchanged glances of admiration of Mark’s cleverness with Mr. Gant, whose perverted sympathies were, however, really and profoundly with his wretched fellow-martyr, Meely.

‘Emily, you had better find another place,’ said Miss Tubbs, with stern calmness—‘not as a nurse. You are no more fit to be a nurse than that baby,’ pointing to Weenums. ‘Lolling in an arm-chair with your hair down and

your cap off! The poor child might have been burned before you could have got free to save her. Come here, Maggot; uum—did they?—poor little popsums!' patting Maggot's head precisely as she would pat a pug's. 'See; I have brought Gantums for a romp.'

At this there were such howls of savage joy as when a rat, fished out of a bag, is held up by the neck before being dropped among the dogs. 'Hurrah! Let's play at horses!' shouted Mark. 'Horses!' screamed Maggot, Tubby, and Weenums with wonderful unanimity. 'Horses,' or, as it should, perhaps, more properly be entitled, 'Horse,' since there was but one animal of the kind in the piece, was a most popular drama in two acts, in which Mr. Gant sustained the principal part. The first act presented the grooming of the horse, the second the driving. The grooming consisted in scrubbing Mr. Gant's head and face with a nail-brush, representing a curry-comb, wielded by Mark with much energy and many hisses, while Mr. Gant, of course, was on his hands and knees. The currycomb was not applied to the horse's back and sides, in part because they were not sensitive, and in part

because the animal was bestridden by Maggot, Tubby, and Weenums together ; who, being excluded by Mark from all share in the grooming, consoled themselves by jumping up and down on the beast's back. The horse, having been thoroughly groomed down, was dragged by the forelock (fiery red) to a rocking-chair to be harnessed. During his progress from the stable to the coachhouse Tubby and Weenums kept their seats on his back, but Maggot got off to walk by his side and stamp with her foot on his hand whenever it touched the floor. It was a sight to make an old man young to see the joy of that child each time she scrunched it. Her laugh was like sunshine set to music. Mr. Gant, however, not having 'the child's heart within the man's,' though not quite unmoved, was unmoved to laughter. The horse having been most elaborately harnessed (for Mark was particular to pedantry in imitating every detail he could remember—be sure he remembered the bit), the second act opened with the driving of the carriage. Tubby and Weenums, observing the unities, stuck still to the beast's back as postillions whose duty it was not to spare the spur. Nor did they.

Mark and Maggot drove, Mark having the command of the reins and Maggot of the whip. Maggot, however, using the whip with such zest and zeal as not to spare even the postillions—whose howls were sweet to Mr. Gant—was promptly disarmed by Miss Tubbs and retired in a sulk to the window. Finding no one but herself a pin the worse for this move she became more and more splenetic, till suddenly, and as one possessed, she darted back to the scene, caught the unhappy horse by the forelock of fire, and gave it so vicious a tug, that Mr. Gant, considering no living in England worth this, suddenly started up. The carriage, being a rocking-chair, was knocked backwards upon Mark ; Tubby and Weenums, ‘like tumbled fruit in grass,’ rolled over and over on the floor, and Maggot, as amazed as Balaam, ran to her aunt. Mark, who withal was a manly little ruffian, thought the thing a joke, was up in a moment, and, being reminded of the breakdown of a cab he had witnessed in Wefton, shouted at the top of his voice, ‘Sit on his head ! Sit on his head !’ So screaming, he sprang like a tiger upon Mr. Gant from behind, clasped him round the throat, and tried to pull

him down; in a second Maggot reinforced him, and between them Mr. Gant, taken by surprise, was borne backwards to the ground. Here Mark sat on his face in a most business-like manner and gave cool and clear orders to his helps. ‘Cut the traces! Keep clear of his hind legs there! Woa! would you?’ This last admonition was addressed to Mr. Gant, who was as restive as he was able to be under the weight of four very fine children sitting on his face and chest. Having succeeded at last in oozing from under them, he gave Mark such a sounding box in the ear as convinced even this vivacious youth that the game was over. Mark, red as fire, looked up amazed for a moment, and then flew at Mr. Gant and gave him a furious kick on the shin.

‘Mark, come here!’ cried Miss Tubbs, in a cold, clear-cut, commanding tone. She felt shocked at Mr. Gant’s childish loss of temper, but she must conceal this feeling from the children lest they should lose respect for their priest—‘Gantums,’ to wit. She must even affect to think the poor children in fault.

‘Mark, did you hear me speak?’ Perhaps Mark couldn’t hear his aunt speak because of

the noise of his own whistling. For he so accompanied with a few careless notes his defiant little swagger to the nursery door. Having reached and opened it without obstruction, he shouted, ‘Come along, Maggot !’ when not only he and Maggot, but Tubby and Weenums, shot out of sight like a shoal of minnows.

‘Mark ! Come back this instant !’ The only reply was ‘Ganderum Gantums ! Ganderum Gantums ! Ganderum Gantums !’ repeated hundreds of times with maddening persistence, first by a single shrill voice, and then by a still shriller chorus. Miss Tubbs strode out of the nursery and along the corridor to the stair-head, the voices ceasing suddenly when she was half-way, and being succeeded by the sound of a scramble and scamper downstairs. She then returned to the nursery, where Mr. Gant, having recovered his temper and lost his courage, was awaiting her in some trepidation. ‘It needs some forbearance to play with children, Mr. Gant.’ (N.B.—Not ‘Vicar,’ but ‘Mr. Gant’—a change of title as significant as Cæsar’s ‘Quirites.’) She could not forgive his ferocity in a moment. ‘Mark, you know, is only a child.’

‘Only a child.’ To Mr. Gant it sounded as though she said ‘Only a mad dog.’ Was there a more devilish being in existence than a child?

‘He is high-spirited and hasty, but very forgiving,’ continued Miss Tubbs, ‘and I have no doubt that when next you come he will have forgotten it and be the same as ever with you. I want you to get on well with him, for I mean him to be one of your choir, Vicar.’ (Cæsar had returned to ‘Milites.’ ‘One of his choir!’ Merciful Heaven! that little demon to haunt him Sunday and weekday at rehearsal and service!)

At this moment the future chorister, conducting his own little choir, was heard serenading them under the window: ‘Ganderum Gantums! Ganderum Gantums! Ganderum Gantums! Ganderum Gantums!’ *ad infinitum*; until Miss Tubbs herself seemed to think it a little monotonous.

‘Tiresome child! The best way is not to notice him. I always find that he comes right if he’s let alone. And if I were you, Vicar, I shouldn’t say a word to him about being sorry, or that, when next you come, as ten to one he will have forgotten the blow by then. Dear, dear! that sing-song is very trying. Let us go

into the library, and we shan't hear it, and they'll never find us out.'

'Thank you, I must go, Miss Tubbs. Would you kindly allow me to set myself to rights a little in Mr. Mills' dressing-room?'

Mr. Gant looked as if he had been in a street fight. His fiery red hair, which he kept accurately parted in the middle, and smooth as glass at the sides, was shooting out tongues of flame, as in a pentecostal picture. His cassock waistcoat, having lost some of its mysterious fastenings, had slipped away from the dog-collar, and exposed an expanse of dingy-looking flannel shirt, while his coat was torn at the collar and dusty down the back.

'Certainly, Vicar. Why, you've torn your coat! If you will take it off I shall get Binns to put a stitch in it.'

'Oh no, thank you. I am going straight home.'

While Mr. Gant was refitting in the dressing-room he racked his brain to think of some excuse for asking Miss Tubbs to accompany him down the drive to the gate. He felt certain he would otherwise be waylaid and mobbed by those—— Here he clenched teeth

and hands. He could have prayed for those children.

‘ You might come as far as St. George’s with me, Miss Tubbs.’

‘ St. George’s! Why, we went over it together only last Monday. Has anything occurred since?’

‘ Well, no; but I thought, perhaps—there were the Prayer-Book markers, you know.’

‘ I told the man plainly as words could speak that he must make the clergy stalls higher to hold such Prayer Books as would fit my markers. He *can’t* have misunderstood me. Perhaps you *had* better go to-day, Vicar, and mention it again. These men are so stupid.’

So there was nothing for it but that the wretched man must go sounding on his perilous way alone. Mark, Maggot, & Co., however, had by this time forgotten his existence. While they were singing their plain-song of ‘ Ganderum Gantums! ’ with undiminished energy, old Shorrocks the gardener, of whom Miss Tubbs herself almost stood in awe, took Mark smartly in the rear with the flat of his spade for trampling upon the bed that was

under the nursery window ; ‘ and one,’ as Tennyson sings, of the whilom joyous linnet—

And one is sad ; his note is changed.

But not for long. Mark rallies his forces at the far side of a manure heap near the back gate of the garden, and suggests a raid upon the pot-house to carry off two flower-pots each for cockshots. In the pot-house, however, his attention is diverted by two pots of paint, red and white, for the woodwork of the frames, when it occurs to the ever ingenious Mark that it would be a sweeter revenge to paint old Shorrocks’ white camellias red and the red white. For Shorrocks carried off prizes for his camellias. Accordingly Maggot is entrusted with the white paint for the red camellias, while Mark set to work with the red paint upon the white. This having been done pretty perfectly, and much paint remaining over which it seemed a shame to waste, Mark suggested their disguising themselves as Red Indians, to frighten crabby old Meely. Red paint and feathers only were required. A cock, after a smart chase, was run into the hen-house, and had his tail plucked out by Mark

while Maggot was painting Tubby and Weenums. Weenums didn't like it at first, it was too like washing. But a sight of Tubby's face when finished convinced him that the resemblance was only superficial, and he submitted with an excellent grace. Then Maggot painted Mark, and Mark Maggot, and flower-pots of suitable sizes for helmets having been picked out and adorned with feathers stuck in the bottom, were fitted on each of their heads by Mark, and the tribe set forth in Indian file upon the war-path. Outside the garden gate they came all but face to face upon Shorrocks wheeling a barrow. Mark and Maggot, moulting their feathered helmets, fled, leaving their rearguard in the enemy's hands. Mark, when near the house, tripped and came down, and looked back as he rose to see if the enemy was hard upon him; but, finding him far off with Tubby and Weenums in either hand, making slowly for the house, he shot away in the opposite direction. Maggot sped past her fallen brother without once looking back, and dashed headlong into the house, into the hall, and almost into the arms of her aunt. 'Gracious Heavens!' exclaimed Miss Tubbs, so

horrified to see her darling in a panic, and covered, as it seemed, with blood, that she had hardly strength to half carry and half drag the child to the nearest sofa, which happened to be in the drawing-room. Maggot in this way was enabled to print an Indian proof impression of her face and frock upon her aunt's sumptuous silk dress, and a fainter but still fair copy upon the sofa.

This, in brief, explains Mr. Gant's escape. When he got down the drive, and out on the road, and breathed freely, he resolved never again, while he lived, to affect a love of children. If then and there he had abjured all his other affectations of liking things he had no taste for, and reading books he had never opened, and understanding subjects which were Greek to him, there would, it is true, have been but little of him left, but the balance would not have been unendurable.

CHAPTER XVII.

GEORGE'S CONFESSION.

WE have discreetly left our lovers to themselves for the last chapter. It would have been in the worst taste to have intruded upon them, and, besides, would have been a blunder no less than a crime. Love, like lotos-eating, is delicious, but stupefying, and lovers' talk to outsiders is

Like a tale of little meaning, though the words are strong.

Nor should we now return to George and Mabel if their happiness were cloudless; for cloudless happiness, like a cloudless sky, is not picturesque. But it was not cloudless. Far from it. Mabel, quick to read the slightest shade of expression even in a little child's face, saw that all was not right with George before they had been a week engaged. The cloud which crossed his face at times threw its shadow

upon hers, and made her miserable for the moment and tormented her afterwards. He was not perfectly happy in their engagement. That was plain. But why? Mabel could think of only one reason—that he had mistaken fancy for affection, and had found out his mistake. And yet—and yet, who ever loved if he did not? She recalled again and again every word and look and tone and gesture by which he seemed ‘to catch up the whole of love and utter it’ more and more passionately and impetuously at every fresh meeting. Still, in the very midst of such a transport, this dark mood seemed to seize him, involuntary as a shudder, and carry him away for the moment, and estrange his very thoughts from her. Whence was it? Surely, if it had nothing to do with her, he would have confided it to her. He seemed to open out all his whole heart to her, except this Bluebeard chamber. Her fate must be hid away in it—her life itself. Mabel was no silly lovesick sentimentalist, but she felt she had staked all on George’s love. If she lost, she mightn’t die; but it would be better for her if she did die. The mere shadow of such a cloud and eclipse ‘had power to shake

her as it passed.' Night after night she paced up and down her room, recalling and repeating his most passionate words, as a charm against the memory of his moody and miserable looks. But the charm would fail, and these looks would haunt and terrify her, working upon her exceeding self-distrust and lowliness. For what was there in her to hold such a heart as George's? You see, her father's supreme contempt for her, making its mark upon her character in her most impressionable years, was not easily erasible. In moments of depression she thought of herself as her father thought of her ; and those moments, when George's moody looks recurred to her, were moments of miserable depression.

At the same hour and in the same mood George also would be pacing up and down his narrow room. What can we say for him? We can say nothing for him. That he was a weak man—pitifully weak, perhaps—our readers will long since have decided. Well, he was weak. He is not an ideal hero by any means. He was not stronger than nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand, but he was at least as strong. It is not easy,

out of a novel, to be brave against the world, especially if the world includes a girl like Mabel ; and though George up to this was a slave, if you like, as

All are slaves who dare not choose
Hatred, slander, and abuse,
Rather than in silence shrink
From the truth they needs must think ;

—yet he was a slave in very good company, and in a very large company, which may even include the reader who condemns him. But even the reader who condemns him would pity him if he saw his naked heart, as he paced up and down his room. His life a lie, and such a lie ! A lie at the fount of truth, poisoning every word and every act and every relationship. The dress he wore a cheat—his position a sacrilege—his bread, holy bread, profaned and stolen. A false priest ! God in heaven ! no more loathsome creature crawls the earth. He must strangle this foul serpent before it coils another fold about him, binding his helpless hands to his sides. At least he must confide in Mabel, and not make her also his dupe. How he abhorred himself for the wicked weakness which made him catch at this innocent life as

he was being swept away, and drag it also into the vortex. It might be supposed that George could think of nothing but Mabel in the very first week of their engagement. Nor could he. It was the thought of Mabel made his cowardice and dishonesty more insupportable than ever. Her love, like an honour conferred by a prince, made the man who won it long to prove himself worthy of it. Worthy of it! Was he worthy of it? He was a living lie to her, as to all. Thus it was that George never felt the falsehood of his position more intensely than on the very morning after his engagement. It was no inconstancy that made his mind recur again that morning to the misery that tormented it the morning before, or it was an inconstancy like Lovelace's :—

Yet this inconstancy is such
As you too shall adore ;
I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more.

It was love itself woke his conscience, which had been lulled to sleep for a few hours. It was true there were baser agencies at work to waken it. Mr. Gant, in his zeal for the Church, lost not a moment in rousing Wefton to a sense

of the danger which threatened it by the appointment of such a man as Kneeshaw to such a living as St. George's. George heard from friend and foe the venomous reports he was at the pains to spread about him ; and, though he could conscientiously contradict many of them, there were some whose truth he had to admit, and he saw then in his friends' shocked faces, as in a glass, the reflection of his own re-awakened conscience. ‘A poor creature,’ you cry, ‘who has to look for his conscience into every face he meets !’ No ; his conscience was no echo, but a voice which, louder or lower, said still the same thing. But he had listened also to other voices—the voices of two men who were older, wiser, better than himself—one, Archer Lawley’s ; the other, that of a London light of the Broad Church party ; and both had said, ‘You thought differently two years since ; you will think differently two years hence. Wait.’ But who had advised him to fling himself, in the interval, into the way of such a girl as Mabel, to seek and gain her love, and blacken her life with the dark shadow of his own ? It was criminal and abominable selfishness. He palliated it to himself with no

excuse. There were excuses for it, and Mabel herself the most overpowering of all ; but he admitted none. No one could condemn him more absolutely and pitilessly than he condemned himself, and no one would have imposed upon him a more terrible penalty than his own remorse. The reader will have seen that he was one of those men who, like children, abandon themselves in joy or sorrow to the mood of the moment ; and the agony of his hour of remorse was as utter as the rapture of the hour of his acceptance.

Thus it was that at times, as he locked into Mabel's face, he felt as the Tempter might have felt, if he could have known remorse, as he looked into the peaceful loveliness of the Eden he was about to desolate. And Mabel would catch this expression clouding his face, and would treasure it, as we treasure bitter memories, and put her own modest and miserable construction upon it, and keep her own sad vigil, as George kept his, half the night through.

‘ What is it, George ? ’

She had been arranging some flowers in a vase on the mantelpiece, and had drawn herself

back with her head on one side to admire the effect, and, finding that a camellia would not harmonise with its surroundings, had taken it out and turned suddenly to fix it in George's coat, when she met his miserable look.

‘What is it, George?’

There was not much in the words, but a world of meaning faltered in her voice and looked through her yearning eyes. There was no misunderstanding or affecting to misunderstand her, and indeed George had made his mind up that morning to confess all, and abide by Mabel's decision. He had no fear of his confession affecting her fate.

Leave thou thy sister when she prays,
Her early heaven, her happy views;
Nor thou with shadow'd hint confuse
A life that leads melodious days,

was advice which did not seem to apply in Mabel's case. George had heard of the strange training through which her father had put her, and seen how she had grown up as a lily in a rank soil, drawing only sweetness and purity out of corruption itself.

He took both her hands in his, drew her towards him, kissed her with a fervour which

was itself a reassurance of unwavering love, and, seating her by his side on the sofa, told her all.

Mabel was infinitely relieved. No doubt she ought to have been shocked, or even horrified; but such is the selfishness of human nature that her first feeling was a sense of relief that George was loyal to his love. Nor again was his disloyalty to his Church, when she turned to think of it, as terrible to her as it would have been to most of her sex. Having the strangest and strongest faith in her father, she had come to think religious doubt was the special temptation of very clever men, who were high above other temptations. Having no earthly battles to fight, they had to fight in the air. George, therefore, in right of his unworldliness and cleverness, was naturally exposed to this temptation, and by the same right would overcome it at last. It was only a question of time. For these reasons Mabel was not as shocked as she ought to have been by his confession—was rather relieved by it, as we have said, and looked her relief, and almost expressed it.

‘I thought—I was afraid’—and then she

paused, ashamed of her selfish relief and of her doubt of George.

‘It’s your turn to confess now,’ he said, turning her face upwards to his with his hand. He felt a great weight taken off him by his confession, and by her calm reception of it.

‘What is it?’

Then with her head leaning against his shoulder, she made the confession—incredible to him—that she imagined his moodiness meant repentance of his engagement. After he had exacted a hundred penalties for this treasonous suspicion of treason, and had come to himself again, he said, while an expression as of acute physical pain crossed his face, ‘But it *is* our engagement which maddens me, my darling. It was not enough to steal the very bread I eat, but I must steal also your hand and happiness.’

‘Steal?’

‘Wasn’t it to steal it, to gain it under false pretences?’

‘Well, I am under no delusion about you now,’ she said, smiling, ‘and I give it to you all over again,’ putting her hand soothingly upon his.

‘But your father wouldn’t have given it ; your aunt wouldn’t have given it to a man of no profession and no prospects. For I *must* give the Church up, Mabel,’ looking anxiously into her face.

‘Of course you must—for a time,’ she said in a clear, decided tone.

‘For ever, darling.’

‘No ; for a time. It will all come back,’ speaking with an unfaltering assurance, as of a settled certainty.

‘But even if it did, St. George’s will never come back, nor any other promotion. I should be a marked man, and a curate all my days. I must give you up, Mabel. I must give you up with all the rest,’ rising, turning from her, and hiding his face on his folded arms, which rested on the mantelpiece. Mabel rose also, and, putting her hand upon his shoulder, said playfully, ‘I see how it is. I was right all along. You give up St. George’s to escape your engagement. But it’s no use. I shall hold you to it. I shall never give you up.’ George turned, clasped her in his arms, and strained her to his breast, murmuring incoherent words of endearment, between his kisses. Mabel, having

with difficulty disengaged herself, thought it safer to change the subject.

‘But why didn’t you decline St. George’s at first?’ she asked, rather perplexed.

‘I *had* written to decline it, but Lawley thought it a passing mood, and that I should come right in time; and I tried hard myself to think so, for to give it up was to give you up. It was the day of the picnic,’ said George expressively, as if the intoxication of that day might excuse anything.

‘But,’ asked Mabel, completely bewildered, ‘did Mr. Lawley think it right that you should say in church and say to dying people what you didn’t believe?’

‘He thought I should come in time to believe it.’

Mabel was silent. She had a feeling little short of reverence for Mr. Lawley, from all she had heard of his goodness, and she had the deepest distrust of her own judgment; but this seemed to her a matter of plain right and wrong, truth and falsehood, on which there could be no two opinions. George marked her significant silence.

‘Lawley didn’t know how deep it had

gone ; and, besides, it wasn't he persuaded me. It was my own selfishness and weakness and cowardice, Mabel.'

' But you're going to resign ? '

' Yes ; too late,' said George bitterly. ' Do you think this thing is but a week old, Mabel ? It has been growing ever so long—long before I knew you ; and yet I must pursue you, and win you, and bind you to me, and drag you down with the wreck. I have been a selfish brute all along,' he groaned.

' I don't see how you could have helped loving me,' said Mabel, thinking it better to treat lightly what he seemed to take most to heart ; ' and if I fell in love with you, it wasn't your fault. Besides, perhaps my love, after all, may not be the misfortune you think it.' But, seeing no answering smile in his haggard face, she added, with a sudden change to solemnity, all her soul in her eyes, ' George, your love came to me when I needed it most, and, perhaps'—speaking hesitatingly, with a timid diffidence—' my love may be some help to you in your great trouble.'

The girl's ideal of life was to live for another, and in her heart was something like

the suggestion of Mordecai to Esther, ‘Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’ She felt more happy than ever in her engagement, for she had a hope, a faith, an assurance that she could help George in a way of which we shall not speak here. George, as he looked into a face that was as the face of a guardian angel, felt more deeply stricken than ever with love and with remorse.

‘Your love? What right have I to your love? I have robbed you of it. I have been an impostor even to you——’

‘George, do you think I fell in love with your white tie?’ with a suspicion of scorn in her voice. She resented this recurrence to such a sordid consideration as the loss of position and prospects.

‘A white tie means a good deal, Mabel, put on or put off; and means more still if left on when it ought to have been torn off. It’s the coward’s white flag. And you did give your love to it, so far as you gave it to what it stood for at the very lowest—common truth and honesty.’

‘And now that I find you so false and dis-

honest as to give up everything for what you think the truth, I may take it back, may I? It is you, George, that have given your love under a mistake, if this was your idea of me.'

'No, Mabel,' he said sadly, 'it is because I knew too well what you were that I cannot forgive myself. I knew that in giving me your love, you were giving me your life, and yet I took it, with this ruin plain before me. It was dastardly selfishness, my darling, and you are the only one in the world who would not say so.'

'It's as well, then, that I'm the only one in the world it concerns,' as a thought of her father's indifference and her aunt's doleful ideal of a clergyman's wife crossed her mind. 'Do you think I should have thanked you for being so heroic as to give me up? You can't forgive yourself for having proposed for me, but, perhaps, *I* shouldn't have forgiven you if you hadn't. Which would you rather have, sir?' she said, reverting again to cheerfulness as likely to be the most effectual exorcism of George's remorse—as indeed it proved. There ensued a 'fond' comparison of dates as to the dawn of love in each of their hearts, in which

Mabel, by most certainly, but unconsciously, antedating her attachment, convinced George that, if he had given her up when he first resolved to do so, *both* would have been heart-broken.

By the time they had come to this consoling conclusion Miss Masters was nearly due in the drawing-room, and they therefore adjourned to the 'nursery' to write the necessary letters of resignation to Dr. Clancy and Mr. Pickles, and to decide upon their plans for the future.

In most girls there is something of the spirit burlesqued in Lydia Languish which is attracted towards romantic sacrifices. Man is as God made him ; but woman is as man has made her, and centuries of our exacting selfishness have implanted in her self-effacement as an instinct. Mabel had, besides, the advantage of an excellent education of this kind from her father. George's resignation, therefore (its cause and his distress apart), was almost welcome to her. It not only drew them closer together, but gave her an opportunity of self-devotion. She felt quite happy in this thought as she leaned lovingly over him while he wrote

his letters—curt to his rector, and courteous to his patron—and suggested the softening of a phrase or the lengthening of a sentence with a delightful sense of identity of interests. George, you may be sure, would have gladly spent the day re-writing his letters with her hand on his shoulder and her head almost touching his. When they were at last written and addressed, there remained the more important question of his future. What was he to do? It was a dismal outlook. Mabel suggested tuition, as it could be carried on with one foot, as it were, still in the Church, to which he might thence most easily return with the return of his faith. But George, not sharing her assurance as to the return of his faith, and having, besides, the deepest distaste and even disgust for pedagogy, convinced himself and her that heresy would be a bar to a decent appointment of this kind, even if he had any university distinction to recommend him for it, which he had not. There was the Bar, but that meant a slow death by starvation to a man of small private means; and there was the medical profession, but here, too, more money than he could command was essential.

For any other calling they could think of he was disqualified either by age, or training, or poverty, or incompetence. There remained only emigration, to which Mabel was as strongly opposed as George was inclined. It was not merely that it would separate him from her, but it would separate him from the Church, she thought, more hopelessly than any of the other alternatives.

‘Well, what else can I do, dearest?’ he asked despondently. Certainly it was a hopeless outlook.

‘I think I should ask Mr. Lawley’s advice, George.’

George had never seen Lawley since the day of the picnic. He was utterly ashamed—as well he might be—of his wicked vacillation. That morning of the picnic he had written to decline St. George’s; in the evening he had allowed Lawley to burn the letter; now he had just re-written it. Between then and now he had done the very thing Lawley had denounced so justly and bitterly—caught Mabel with his drowning hands and dragged her down with him. Thus the mere mention of Lawley’s

name awoke the self-reproach Mabel had lulled to sleep.

‘ You’re only a child,’ he groaned abruptly. ‘ You don’t know what you’re doing, or what’s before you. But I know, and yet—I can never forgive myself.’

Here was her work to do all over again.

‘ George, promise me never again to speak of our engagement in this way.’

‘ But——’

‘ Promise me.’

‘ You don’t——’

‘ Promise me.’

Of course George had to promise ; with the reservation, admitted with much reluctance, that he might at least talk of it to others in this way. In speaking of others he was thinking of Lawley, who would talk of it and force him to talk of it in no other way.

At this point Miss Masters’ voice, calling for Mabel, put an end to their deliberations. George, having taken a lingering leave, as if he were on the eve of embarking for Australia, went straight to the Post Office with the momentous letters. It was curious to feel, as he held them between his finger and thumb for

a moment before dropping them into the box, that he was about to let go with them for ever his past life, his position and prospects. In another moment they were gone out of his hands, and, having thus burned his boats and bridges, he set out for Fenton to consult Archer Lawley.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FENTON FOLK.

WE possess one of the only three copies which were sold of a 'Lecture on Local Names,' given by Dr. Clancy, and printed at the request of an enthusiastic audience. To it we are glad to confess our obligation for the derivation of the word 'Fenton.' The village was so called because it was perched on a hill. The learned lecturer adduced the analogous derivations by antiphrasis not only of 'lucus a non lucendo,' but of 'ludus a non ludendo,' of 'bellum a nullâ re bellâ,' and of 'cœlum a celando—quia apertum est.' 'There were other theories anent the name,' he said, 'far fetched and fantastic theories, which it would be a mere waste of words to consider in the face of these two indisputable facts that the place was call Fen-ton, or town, and that it was seated on a hill.'

Anyhow, Fenton was seated on a hill, high above the hum and smoke of Wefton :—

In regions mild, of calm and serene air,
Above the smoke and stir of that dim spot.

It commanded a view of one of the loveliest of all the lovely valleys in the West Riding, the vista ending in—Wefton. It is said that Mr. Ruskin, on the occasion of a visit to Wefton, was brought by his host to admire the view from Fenton Crag. He looked at it long and earnestly till the involuntary tears came into his eyes, and he exclaimed, in a voice that faltered with emotion, ‘Out, damned spot! out, I say !’ This view of murky Wefton notwithstanding, Fenton is so exquisitely situated that we might have expected it to be the favourite and fashionable suburb of that good town ; yet, by some curious irony of fate, it is inhabited mostly by colliers, who work deep down in the bowels of the valley beneath, and seldom see the sun, to say nothing of the view it shines on. On this account, and on account also of the wretchedness of its endowment (140*l.* per annum), Fenton was considered so undesirable a living that Archer Lawley was presented to it. Only lay patronage, and rather reckless lay

patronage, would have given such a man as Mr. Lawley the charge even of these few sheep in the wilderness. Certainly neither Dr. Clancy nor his lordship of Ribchester would have trusted him with a flock of goats. The man, by the accounts of his clerical brethren, who ought to know best, was hardly even a Churchman, not to say a Christian. They said that he once took a service without a surplice (the vestry key being lost), that he read the burial office over unbaptized adults and infants, that he had attended the funeral of a Unitarian minister, that he never read the Athanasian Creed, that he spoke of Apostolical Succession as an Irish pedigree, of the two Houses of Convocation as Pyramus and Thisbe played by Bottom and Co., and of Lord Penzance, of the Court of Arches, as Matthew Hopkins, the witch-finder. In a word, he made light of all those things which all parties in the Church, as represented in Wefton, agreed to regard as of the most awful and vital importance. That such a man should have been appointed to a living by professing members of the Church of England was a lamentable abuse of patronage which shocked Dr. Clancy to the soul. It is

true that the patrons asked Dr. Clancy to appoint to the post and that the vicar could induce no one to take it, not even his junior curate (an ex national schoolmaster, who was then within a month of his ordination as priest); still, surely in all England a fitter man than Mr. Lawley might have been found? Probably the patrons had not the means or will to search all England, and so they laid hands suddenly on Mr. Lawley who was glad to accept the living as an escape from an intolerable curacy. It is only fair to say at the same time that the people of Mr. Lawley's parish did not at all take the clerical view of the appointment. They were perfectly satisfied with their pastor. The fact is, they were one and all what Bacon calls 'common people;' and as he says, 'the common people understand not many excellent virtues. The lowest virtues draw praise from them; the middle virtues work in them astonishment or admiration; but of the highest virtues they have no sense or perceiving at all.' The Fenton folk being, as we say, 'common people,' had no sense or perceiving of the highest ecclesiastical virtues of views and vestments, and would hardly have appreciated even Dr. Clancy himself, who was all

views like a sketch-book. They would probably, in their swinish inappreciation of what is ecclesiastically precious, have likened him to one of their own engines if all its steam was allowed to escape through the whistle and none turned on to the wheels. But Archer Lawley's virtues, such as they were, came within their narrow horizon, and 'drew praise from them,' and even love. They were a very warm-hearted people—as warm-hearted as any in the West Riding, and that is saying a great deal—and all their warmth of heart was drawn out by a man who seemed to consider helplessness of any kind as having a claim like a claim of kindred upon him. He had the deepest pity for the poor, and sympathy with their dreary lives and weary struggles; and when to poverty was added sickness or old age, or orphanage, there was no sacrifice of his own comfort he would not make for its relief. When one of Napoleon's suite at St. Helena would have bundled off the footpath out of his way an old woman bent double beneath the burden of age and of a few sticks she had gathered for firewood, the ex-emperor rebuked him and gave place to her with the words, 'Respect the

burden.' Now Lawley, among his other eccentric notions, held that these words expressed the spirit of Christianity almost better than the Athanasian Creed. For himself, he always respected burdens of all kinds—of poverty, of sickness, of trouble, of the weakness of childhood, or of old age. And in his kindly dealings with those thus burdened he would always confer a favour as if he were receiving it. It was not to be wondered at, therefore, that the Fenton folk, with all their love for him—and they really did love him—could not but admit among themselves that he was 'soft,' *i.e.* not quite 'reet in his yed.' He couldn't pass a dirty little squalling brat knocked into the gutter by his playmate without lifting him out and consoling him with a penny; nor an old woman gleaning crumbs of coal dropped from the waggons on the roads without helping to carry her heavy kitload. When old Betty Bartle, who lived all alone in a lair she called a room, was knocked down and run over, he had her brought to his house and nursed and doctored; and he sat up the night through with Dick o' Bob's, a collier, whom no one else dare go near, as he was supposed to have been seized with

Asiatic cholera, of which there had been some cases in Wefton. In truth, Archer Lawley, though by all clerical accounts a most discreditable clergyman, was a very kindly man, and a very able man besides. It is true, the Fenton folk 'reckoned nowt on him as a praicher.' He was not fit to hold a candle to the Rev. Ephraim Howlett, a neighbouring clergyman, one of Dr. Clancy's appointments, whose sermons were terrible as

A tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

And, in truth, Lawley was not a brilliant preacher by any means. He was homely, wholesome, and matter-of-fact, and seemed to tell them nothing they did not know already. Now the secret of popular preaching among the poor is, if possible, to preach always funeral sermons. But, if this is not possible always, then to explain to them all mysteries in each sermon. 'Cupidine humani ingenii libentius obscura creduntur,' saith Tacitus; and Cæsar might have had in his prophetic eye the popular preachers of our day when he wrote, 'Communi fit vitio naturæ, ut invisis, latitantibus atque

incognitis rebus magis confidamus, vehementiusque exterreamur.'

When, however, we say that the would-be popular preacher to the poor should (failing a funereal subject) explain all mysteries, we do not advise his explaining them so clearly and conclusively that there can be no doubt or difficulty left in the meanest mind. This would be to err on the other side, for the poor like mysteries to be mysteriously explained. To make things too plain to them is to insult their understanding. 'Sir Joshua,' says Boswell, 'once observed to Johnson that he had talked above the capacity of some people with whom they had been in company together. "No matter, sir," said Johnson, "they consider it as a compliment to be talked to as if they were wiser than they are. So true is this, sir, that Baxter made it a rule in every sermon that he preached to say something that was above the capacity of his audience."' And it would be a mistake to explain all mysteries too clearly, not for this reason only, but also because mystery in medicine is all but indispensable. In the eyes of the poor a sermon is like a prescription —the more enigmatic and mysterious it is the

more potent must be the medicine it prescribes. Now Lawley was not enigmatic and mysterious, but intelligible, and therefore contemptible as a preacher. Besides, he was a great cricketer, and it was absurd to suppose that a man who could handle a bat as he did could also handle a text in a masterly manner. The Fenton folk, however, thought well of the man, if not of his sermons, and, taking him altogether, would not have exchanged him even for the Rev. Ephraim Howlett.

On his part, Mr. Lawley also thought much of the Fentonians. ‘Sweetest nut hath sourest rind.’ They were rough and sharp of speech and manner, but at heart most kindly and generous, and Lawley, at first disgusted, was at last delighted with them. He went in and out amongst them, welcome as sunshine, and was at home in every house in the place—except his own. For now we come to the skeleton in the cupboard—the MacGucken.

Lawley’s house had not been built for a parsonage, but was a rambling old farm-house—a random collection of after-thoughts put together piecemeal and higgledy-piggledy, generation after generation, as fantastic and

incoherent as a dream. Of the score or so of rooms in it, Lawley and his servant occupied but four, and the rest were wasted ; until in an evil hour it occurred to our eccentric friend, five years before the opening of our story, to convert it into a convalescent hospital for two or three children who had been ill with other than infectious disorders. It was a silly whim, no doubt ; but he certainly paid more dearly for it than he deserved, since it led to his engagement of the MacGucken. The MacGucken had been a nurse in the children's ward of Wefton Infirmary, and a very excellent nurse she was—clean, firm, kindly, patient, and indefatigable, but intensely and intolerably Yorkshire. Such a Pharisee never breathed in or out of Judaea. The woman could hardly make a bed without bragging of it, and bragging of it at such length and with such triumphant references to all the bad bedmakers in the world, that a man like Lawley would rather lie on straw for the rest of his life than have to pay daily this price for his bed. Not a day passed without a scene of this kind occurring at least once. The MacGucken would come to the study door and knock—she always knocked

most scrupulously. Lawley would give a despairing look at the article he was deep in composing, and say meekly, 'Come in.'

'Mr. Lawley, sir, could you spare me a moment, sir, if *you* please?'

Lawley would rise with a gloomy resignation and follow her through the long and winding passage to the far-off kitchen. Striding into the middle of the kitchen with the mien of Lady Macbeth, she would turn, face her master with an expression that plainly said, 'Now, be prepared,' and, pointing to the fireplace, cry, 'Just look at that, sir; look at that, sir, if you please.'

Lawley looks vaguely and vainly at the fender, the fireirons, the oven, the boiler, the fire, the hissing kettle upon it, the blinking cat beside it, the burnished ashpan beneath it. What was it? Was it something dreadful or admirable? He tries to throw into his face and voice an expression that would do for either: 'Ah!'

'What do you think of that, sir?'

What *was* he to think? He hits happily upon a skeleton answer that would fit anything: 'I don't know what to say, Nurse.'

'Now, sir, you see for yourself! That's the way Sarah Jane does her work. I do believe

she'd sit in the chair twirling her thumbs with that'—pointing to the still mysterious abomination—‘staring her in the face all day, and never stir hand or foot to fettle it. It caps me how ever she gets her time on. It does indeed. She hasn't a half day's work to do any day in the week, let alone Sunday, and half of that wouldn't be done if it wasn't for me. I can't help myself. I must be amang it. I can no more see a job the like of that waiting to be done, and not do it, than I can hear a bairn cry and not go to it. When I was in the Infirmary them other nurses would let the handles of the doors get so as you wouldn't know whether they were brass or brick, and many and many's the time I couldn't sleep with them on my mind, and I've got up and gone round and scoured them, I have, till you could see the whole ward in one of them. Wheriver there was a job that was nobody's job, it was always Nurse MacGucken's job. And t' Doctor would say, t' haase Doctor—Sykes they called him—he'd say. “What brings you down here, Nurse? This is not your place.” And I'd say, “Yes, Doctor,” I'd say, “wherever there's wark to do that nobody else will do is always Nurse

MacGucken's place," I'd say. And he'd say, "Nurse, niver a better worker was born into this world."'

By the way, to appreciate the MacGucken's modesty properly, it must be remembered that in her system of ethics hard work was the simple sum and substance of all virtue : "Niver a better worker was born into this world," he'd say. And I'd say, "It's my one fault ; I know it is. I can't help it, Doctor. I can't see wark going to waste, as a body may say——",

At this point the wretched Sarah Jane, the Helot who was the foil to this Spartan, would be heard coming along the passage, and the MacGucken would pause, and Lawley would slink away respited. But only respited. Half-an-hour later, when he had happily forgotten her existence, and was deep in his work again, that thrice-confounded knock would be heard.

'Come in !'

'Now, sir !'

'Yes ?'

'You'll see a difference now, sir, I promise you.'

There was nothing for it but the wretched

man must leave his work and follow her again to the kitchen.

‘Now, sir ! Does it look the same thing?’

Well, it did. Except that the cat had gone he couldn’t see the shadow of a shade of difference in anything. It wouldn’t do to say, ‘No ; the cat’s gone, I see ;’ so he said safely, ‘It’s better now.’

‘Better ! It’s ten shillings better. It’s just as when it comed through the shop—so it is. When I was at the Wefton Infirmary,’ &c., &c.

Lawley was lucky if he had to submit to these maddening interruptions only twice a day. And yet he put up with them. The fact is, he was a most abject coward where a woman, and especially a woman-servant, was concerned. The MacGucken had him, and felt she had him, wholly at her mercy. So Lawley ate his leek, and eke he swore, so to speak, at her from the pulpit. From this coward’s castle he preached sermon after sermon against Pharisaism as a special West Riding characteristic—as indeed it was—but with a special aim at his enemy. Even this cowardly revenge, however, he had to forego after the delivery of a terrific blow at her from the text of the

Pharisee and publican parable. He was no sooner seated in his arm-chair on his return from church than she attacked him before she had taken her things off.

‘The sermon came home to me this morning, sir.’

Lawley shivered in his shoes, and repented abjectly of his temerity. ‘Ah !’ he gasped nervously.

‘Yes, sir. Before I went to the Infirmary I was in service with a publican. Eh ! but he was a shocker, ye mind ; allus a-swearin and a-callin names, and a-treatin folk as if they were the very dirt under his feet ; just for all the world like him you was praiching about. And I told him one day just what you said, sir, that he wasn’t one bit better than other folk, nor as good ; and he gave me notice then and there to leave, and I lost my place through tellin the truth plain out. But truth I’ve allus told and allus will—allus.’ When excited she slipped back into Yorkshire.

Lawley tried to explain that she mistook the Pharisee for the publican, and mistook the publican for a beer-seller, whereas he was a farmer of the taxes.

‘No, nor Slicer wasn’t, in a way of speaking, a beer-seller altogether, sir, but a bit of a farmer, as you say, sir ; and kep’ three cows and a pony ; and I had all the milk to look after, and the butter to make, and many’s the time the missus said to me—she was noan a bad sort of a woman, warn’t the missus, and she and me had niver a wrang word all the time I was with her—“Mary Ann,” she says, for she allus called me Mary Ann—“Mary Ann,” she says, “there’s thim that can make butter, and there’s thim that can make cartwheel-grease. But of all the butter-makers I’ve iver had, and I’ve had a many (for you know what a sharp tongue Slicer has, and he sends ‘em packing faster than I can get ‘em, he does)—but of all the butter-makers I’ve iver had, there’s none,” she says, “could come up to you, Mary Ann, for yallowness and cheesiness ; and as for honesty, I never mark a till sixpence now ;” thim was her very words, and she lived near Bradford, past the “Cock and Bottle,” up the Otley Road.’

Lawley gave up preaching personal sermons. Nor was this the only price he had to pay for the incomparable MacGucken. Though in

robust health he was regarded by her as in an extremely critical condition ; and as she had so long to do not only with invalids, but with infantile invalids, she would treat him as a sick child. Holding beef to be indigestible and pastry deadly, she restricted him to mutton—mostly mince or chops—and to sago and arrow-root puddings. These last the Helot, who enjoyed the reversion of them, pronounced ‘ the nothingest things she had ever tasted ; ’ but Lawley took them meekly, as part of the dispensation. Indeed, if this was all, he would not have minded much, for as regards food he was as imbecile as the dotard Barzillai, who tasted not what he ate or what he drank. But this was not all. She was also always on the look-out for an excuse to dose him. If he coughed, or even blew his nose, she would administer to him either an earthy decoction she called herb tea, or a gruesome gruel in which he detected at least two of the three ingredients of gunpowder—nitre and sulphur. This he would find in his bedroom on one side of a roaring fire, and at the other, on a chair, a red petticoat and a strip of flannel which looked as if in its youth it had been a garter. The garter

he knew was meant to be bound about his throat, but what purpose the red petticoat was meant to serve he did not know. Nothing would have induced our misogynist to touch either of these articles with the tips of his fingers, yet the noisy resentment of the Mac-Gucken must on no account be provoked by their appearing next morning to have been unused. So Lawley would take them up with the tongs, and lay them one upon the other in a corner, and smuggle up his dog and induce him to lie all night upon them to give them the comfortable look of having been slept in. But as even the dog couldn't be induced to drink the gruel, it had to be spooned into the fire.

There was not much to complain of in this grandmotherliness? Well, no ; but there was the next morning. Lawley would hardly have got into his study before she'd bustle in—breakfast being put back half an hour for the purpose—and take out of him the value of her considerateness ten times told in brag and obligation.

‘Well, sir?’

‘Eh?’ Lawley loathed the odious self-complacency of her manner on these occasions.

‘You found all ready, sir, last night? I

thought I'd surprise you. If I had mentioned it you'd have said, "No, Nurse, thank you, there's nothing the matter." But it isn't like that I'd be in the Wefton Infirmary fifteen years and not know a churchyard cough when I hear it, a-tearing and a-wheezin' back and forards like a saw. I couldn't sleep for hearkening for it. I couldn't indeed.'

This, like many of the incomparable Mac-Gucken's statements, must be taken with a grain and a half of salt; for, as she slept with the children at the other end of the rambling old house, only a telephone could have conveyed a cough to her.

'But I think I have given it a check, for you look a deal better this morning, sir, a long seet better; and well you may, for I niver knew that gruel to fail. It's what I allus takes myself, for I'd niver give you anything, sir, I wouldn't take myself.' This last boast was always on the Incomparable's lips, and was one of the few of her brags that were true without qualification. For, indeed, it is only justice to her to say that she always did treat Lawley quite like one of the family. 'Yes, it's what I allus takes myself when I'm that done with work that I can't bide to stand, and I shiver so

that I shake the chair I sit in, and break out all ovver in a cold sweat,' &c., &c.

Sometimes, after half-an-hour of this, Lawley would be wrought up to a pitch of such exasperation that, if he had had a spark of courage, he would have given the woman notice then and there. But he was a poor creature where women were concerned, and he would at last leave the study in the enemy's possession, and go into the garden and walk violently up and down and work it off a bit. Here George, coming to consult him, found him walking like Weston, as for a wager, up and down a side-walk.

‘Kneeshaw !’ he cried excitedly, after they had greeted each other, ‘I must give it up.’

‘What ?’

‘The living. The Church.’

‘I thought so.’

‘It’s become insupportable.’

‘Just what I came to say to you.’

‘You ! what’s she to you ?’

‘Who ?’

‘The MacGucken.’

‘Oh !’

‘It’s the only way to get rid of her.’

CHAPTER XIX.

FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

LAWLEY was not jesting by any means. He really meditated burning the house, so to speak, to get rid of the vermin. Being in the habit of putting press work off to the last moment and working then at a pressure of two hundred and fifty pounds to the square inch, he would sometimes get into a state of such nervous irritability as made a noisy interruption of any kind intolerable. On the day of George's visit he had been in this way racing the post, when in came the MacGucken for the fourth time that day, and her blatant brag had the soothing effect upon him of the strut and screech of a peacock. When he could stand it no longer he simply locked the MS. in his desk and shot out of the room like a shell. The MacGucken concluded he was ill (the true reason was not even conceivable by her), and

bustled off to prepare him some herb tea ; while Lawley, as we have seen, was found by George letting off steam in the garden.

It was impossible for George, notwithstanding his friend's glum face and his own trouble, not to laugh at Lawley's sole hope of escape from his Tsetse fly.

‘Couldn’t you try giving up the hospital, first ?’

‘It wouldn’t do. She’d not leave. She’d only give all her time to me,’ with a rueful grin at this appalling consummation.

‘Then I tell you what. I’d go away and give her notice by letter, and not come back till she had cleared out.’

‘I did,’ said Lawley, in a tone of profound despondency, ‘but it was no good. She wrote back to say that she knew things were not made as comfortable for me as they ought to have been, but that I was to send away Sarah Jane, and take in her stead the MacGucken’s sister (who might be persuaded to come to *me* for a few pounds more wage than was wasted on Sarah Jane), and then I should be perfectly happy, and might see myself in the bars of the grate.’

Lawley had perforce to join in the laugh with which George greeted this characteristic letter.

‘And Sarah Jane,’ continued Lawley, ‘is the best servant I ever had. I hardly ever see her, and she never opens her lips to me when I do. But that woman——’ Lawley’s face filled in this ferocious aposiopesis. ‘In the summer I can write in the class-room of the school in the evenings, but for the rest of the year a night-school’s held in it, and I have nowhere to go. I’m not safe in my bedroom. If I stay half-an-hour in it she comes up and knocks and asks if I have been taken ill, and then she’s sure to concoct some devil’s broth for me to drink at night. No ; I don’t see anything for it but to resign. I don’t, indeed.’

‘I think I’d try giving her notice again, first,’ hesitatively suggested his feeble fellow-bachelor.

‘It’s easy to talk. Besides, she’d not take it, and she’d be more attentive than ever after it, as she was after the last.’

‘You might marry,’ hazarded George, after a pause, in a still more doubtful manner.

‘Marry ! What ! cast out a devil through

Beelzebub? It's the cure of the Médecin Malgré Lui for Geronte's being deafened now and then by Lucinde, to deafen him altogether.'

These pleasantries against the sex of his arch-enemy had the soothing effect on Lawley's irritation that Mr. Shandy's caustic witticisms had upon his ill-humour. And they not only dissipated the remains of his ill-temper, but turned his thoughts to George's affair of the heart.

'I ought to ask your pardon, Kueeshaw, as a Benedick: how is your affair getting on?'

Then George told all with much humiliation of heart.

'Did you say you had posted the letters to Clancy and Pickles?'

'Yes; I posted them on my way here.'

Lawley was silent. He couldn't say anything pleasant. This vacillation in his eyes was contemptible, and cruel too, for his thoughts lingered about Mabel as a miracle of womanhood.

George was at no loss to interpret his silence.

‘ You can’t think worse of me than I do of myself, Lawley.’

‘ What are you going to do?’ asked Lawley abruptly. He couldn’t sincerely say anything in mitigation of George’s self-condemnation.

‘ I don’t know. I was thinking of emigrating.’

‘ Emigrating! As what?’

‘ I thought of buying land in Canada to farm.’

‘ You don’t know much about farming, I suppose?’

‘ No. I know nothing of anything,’ said George despondently.

‘ Did you ever try writing?’

‘ I have contributed papers to an entomological journal, if you call that writing. Dry and technical descriptions of what I have noticed, as mechanical as reporting, and they have been accepted rather as a favour done to me. But the few attempts I’ve made at literature proper have been failures. No; my writing wouldn’t pay for the paper it’s written on.’

‘ Well, it’s not a thing to marry on at best — “a great staff but a sorry crutch,” as Scott

calls it. There's that first cousin to parsoning, pedagogy.'

George shook his head. 'I've neither inclination nor qualification for it. There's nothing for it but farming in Australia or Canada, Lawley.'

'I don't think you've much inclination or qualification for that either,' growled the relentless Lawley. 'And what of Miss Masters? Is she to seek her fortune with you, or wait for you till you have found it?'

'Look here, Lawley,' cried George, stopping suddenly on the path and turning to stand face to face with his friend. 'I know what I seem to you, and what I have been—silly, senseless, selfish, brutal—no words are too strong for it. Yet, I tell you that, though I love that girl like my life, I would be glad—*glad*, I tell you, if she could forget me.'

There was no disbelieving and no resisting the intense earnestness of George's haggard face. Lawley was moved by the misery in it, and put his hand soothingly on his shoulder.

'It's too late, now, Kneeshaw,' he said sadly, in a tone that belied the seeming reproach of the words. The two friends

walked up and down together in sad silence for a few moments.

‘ May I ask, Kneeshaw, how much money you have to start upon ? ’

‘ About one thousand two hundred pounds.’

‘ You will not think it a liberty if I offer you a loan of a few hundreds I have no use for ? ’ asked Lawley, hurriedly and shame-facedly. ‘ You see,’ he hastened to add, ‘ I shall be a rich man in a year or two, as I’m my uncle’s heir ; and, besides, the money is really and truly lying idle.’ They had known each other only for a few months, but in that time each had shown the other his whole heart, and a life’s acquaintance could not have brought them nearer together.

‘ Thank you, Lawley,’ said George, taking and pressing for a moment his friend’s hand ; ‘ but I believe I should be better able to manage a small farm than a big one to begin with. I promise you that if I find I need it I shall ask you for it.’

Lawley, however, was not satisfied. He pressed the matter with such eagerness and yet with such delicacy—putting it, as he always put any kindness, as a favour he was not offering,

but asking—that George at last consented to accept such a loan as would raise his little capital to two thousand pounds.

Lawley, being allowed his way, felt towards George as we always feel towards the man we befriend. For benefits stir an even kindlier feeling in the heart of the benefactor than in that of the beneficiary. Lawley therefore, already moved by George's miserable remorse, was conquered by his acceptance of the loan, and began to make the allowances which we hope our readers, too, will make, for his vacillation. Even the image of Mabel, which, a moment ago, lingered in his mind as an aggravation of George's recklessness, appeared now to him as its palliation. Who could know such a girl without loving her, or love her without forgetting all else in his love? This was not bad for a misogynist, who had good reason for his misogyny, too. Still he was perplexed, as well he might be, with the suddenness of George's changes of mood and mind. Within a week he had written letters to decline, to accept, to resign St. George's, and had resolved not to try to link his precarious fortunes to Mabel's, had linked them, and had

repented of it. It was not enough to say that within that week George had realised the full force at once of a feeling and of a conviction, each of which had grown insensibly to an extraordinary strength ; or to say that this feeling and this conviction had a terrible struggle for the mastery in his mind. There remained besides to be explained, what to Lawley seemed inexplicable, the absolute and decisive victory which the feeling won yesterday and the victory, equally absolute and decisive, which the conviction won to-day. It seemed to Lawley to indicate nothing less than a mind like a wind-shaken reed. Yet, in truth, the feeling itself, as we have said already, helped George's conscience to conquer.

For Love himself took part against himself,
And Duty loved of Love.

For Mabel's love, which Lawley thought had lulled George's conscience to sleep, only woke it to a keener sense of the falsehood of his position, and decided at once and once for all his wavering resolution. Such a love, George thought, would make a lying slave brave and honest ; and for himself he felt

The nobler through her love,
O three times less unworthy !

We have taken the opportunity of Mr. Lawley's absence to explain the different stand-points from which the two friends looked at the situation. For Lawley, who was an inveterate smoker, had gone in to fetch out pipes. On his return he said, while filling his pipe—

‘I thought you had made your mind up to give the Church another chance under more favourable circumstances.’

‘So I had, and so, perhaps, I might have “given it another chance,” as you put it pleasantly, if she had refused me.’

‘If she had refused you !’

‘Yes ; Lawley, the love of a girl like that makes a man honest in spite of himself.’

Lawley was silent for a moment, pondering upon this effect of love. ‘You have discovered the true Ithuriel's spear, Cupid's arrow :—

No falsehood can endure
Touch of celestial temper.

Still I think, if you told her all, she would herself have advised you as I did.’

‘I did tell her all.’

‘Yes?’

‘She said I must, of course, quit the Church.’

‘Did she?’ exclaimed Lawley in a tone of amazement. This girl was by no means to be confounded with the rest of her sex. ‘And wasn’t shocked?’

‘Shocked? No. She seemed to look at it as a trouble more than as a sin. I think she had her father in her mind; and, besides, she was quite assured I should come back in time.’

‘She *was* of my mind, then?’

‘Well, no; not exactly,’ said George, smiling. ‘When I told her your advice she couldn’t believe it was yours. You must know she has an immense veneration for you, and I put the thing so clumsily to her that she thought you advised me to go on saying what I didn’t believe until I came to believe it.’

This didn’t seem an altogether perverted version of his advice even to Lawley himself. But it certainly set it in rather a preposterous light. The thing, however, which most struck Lawley and lingered afterwards in his memory was the news that ‘she had an immense veneration for him.’ He was too proud to be vain. He thought little of most people’s praise, and

least of all of the good opinion of the sex ; but Mabel's good opinion was a different thing, and a very pleasant thing to him. When a good thing does come out of Galilee, we prize it in proportion to its rarity, and Mabel seemed to Lawley such an exception to her sex that he was surprised into an extraordinary and perhaps extravagant opinion of her. He pulled silently at his pipe for a few moments, chewing the while the cud of sweet and bitter fancies.

‘She has no great veneration for my honesty,’ he said at last.

‘She thought at first that your views were as extreme as mine ; but I set her right as to this, and you still keep your pedestal. Still, she certainly does seem to have extraordinary ideas of clerical honesty or dishonesty,’ continued George with some bitterness. ‘She doesn't seem to think, for instance, that a clergyman's standard of right and wrong, truth and falsehood, ought to be so very much lower than a layman's.’

‘My withers are unwrung,’ said Lawley placidly.

‘You ! How could you think I meant you ? I was thinking of the Wefton chapter-meeting.

You should have heard Ainslie and Clancy proving opposite things from the same book.'

'The book is like the dam there,' said Lawley, pointing down to the reservoir of a factory; 'it reflects heaven, but every man that looks into it sees only his own reflection. Look at the gathering on that common. There are a flock of geese, some sheep, two donkeys, and a pig, all grazing on the same grass, and each assimilating what suits itself. The same pasture clothes the geese with feathers, the sheep with wool, the donkeys with hair, and the pig with bristles. A clergyman's conscience, Kneeshaw, is like his digestion: it has a wonderfully assimilative power.'

Lawley had certainly no reason to love his cloth, and his words were bitter; but weren't they stones thrown from a glass house? This thought couldn't but cross George's mind and, perhaps, Lawley's own also. And yet, that the MacGucken should be his sole reason for resignation, if he resigned!

'*You're out of Egypt, anyhow,*' continued Lawley. '*When do you think of sailing?*'

'The sooner the better,' with a sigh from the very bottom of his heart given to Mabel.

‘I shall see you off, if you’ll allow me, old fellow,’ said Lawley warmly, striving in this way to express his sympathy.

George understood his friend well enough to know that this offer meant more from him than his other offer of money, of which Lawley was extraordinarily careless.

‘Will you? I don’t know anything I should like better, unless—unless—Lawley, if you would promise to write to me now and then and tell me anything you know or hear about her, I should leave England with a lighter heart.’

‘Of course I shall write to you. But she’ll write herself?’

‘I don’t know. If her father forbids her, she won’t.’

‘But I shall never see her, or even hear of her after you go.’

‘You might call,’ urged George persuasively.

‘I can’t get on with them,’ pleaded Lawley, alluding to the intractability of the sex in general.

‘You got on very well together the other day. You might have known each other for years.’

‘She’s not like the rest, certainly. But I should only bore her.’

‘Bore her! Shall I tell you what she said about you yesterday? “That a talk with you was like looking through illustrations of the best authors by the best artists.” She has an extraordinary opinion of you.’

‘I shall soon disenchant her. Well; if she is forbidden to write, I promise you to call and report.’

The two friends were silent for a minute or two, lost in anxious thought: George torturing himself with the fear of all direct intercourse between Mabel and him being stopped, and Lawley troubled about the possible consequences to himself of intimacy with Miss Mabel Masters. He began to feel a keen personal interest in Kneeshaw’s being permitted to communicate himself with her.

‘Doesn’t her father know of your engagement?’

‘Her father! He lives in Laputa. When I asked his consent at first, he wasn’t quite sure whether she was twelve or twenty, and then he couldn’t see what he had to do with so small a matter.’

‘He’s not likely to interfere, then, one way or the other.’

‘No ; not unless his sister suggests it to him. But he has made all his authority over to her, and you know what she is. I can’t imagine how a girl like Mabel can come of such a strain.’

‘It’s wonderful, no doubt, how

The music of the moon
Sleeps in the plain eggs of the nightingale.

I don’t know her father ; but certainly there’s not much of her aunt in her. That woman regards the world as a looking-glass in which to see flattering reflections of herself. By the way, Kneeshaw,’ he asked, as a horrible misgiving chilled his blood, ‘am I likely to see much of her when I call ? ’

‘Not if you call in the morning. She’s never down before twelve.’

‘That’s very early to call, isn’t it ? ’

‘Then she has, besides, a beauty sleep every afternoon from two to three, of which I often take advantage. I did to-day.’

‘I had more than an hour of her to myself on the day of the picnic, and she put me to the rack the whole time to extort compliments.

She's a kind of porcelain MacGucken, by Jove ! ' he cried, warming up with the remembrance of that bad hour ; ' and ten minutes of her goes a long way. Not that I'd mind it if it did you any good, you know,' he added with his usual generosity, ' but there's no use facing it for nothing.'

George, however, reassured him that he might venture without foolhardiness any day between two and half-past three, as she took at least half-an-hour to make herself presentable after her beauty sleep.

Still Lawley was not quite happy in his engagement as internuncius. ' If you would condescend to flatter her, I don't think she'd interfere between you,' he said.

' I don't know. She wouldn't have consented to our engagement if I hadn't been vicar-designate of St. George's, and now I'm not a curate even. No ; I'm afraid she'll influence her brother to forbid her writing. Besides, even if she was allowed to write, there are some things she wouldn't tell me—if she was persecuted, for instance, or made miserable on my account. Lawley, you couldn't do me a greater kindness than to keep up your

acquaintance with her in any case, and let me know how things go on there.'

'I don't see what good it would do you to know she was made miserable if you couldn't help her.'

'At least it would do me good to know she was *not* made miserable, as I should be always fancying she was, no matter how cheerfully she wrote ; and this you might be able to tell me.'

'You'll think I'm making a great fuss about a small matter, Kneeshaw ; but the truth is I feel I'm not the man for so delicate a mission. If you can't get better, of course I shall undertake it, and do the best I can.'

George thought Lawley's self-distrust sprang from the very opposite of its true source. He imagined that his misogynist friend feared the embarrassment of Mabel's society, while what he really feared was its fascination. 'In the matter of love,' says a Spanish proverb, 'you begin when you will, and leave off when you can ;' and Lawley felt that he might have only the beginning of this business in his own power.

'I know no one else that could do it for me, and there's no one else she would like so

much to see,' urged George. 'I think you'd get to like her when you knew her.'

Just what Lawley thought.

'I'm not quite such a Goth as you think, Kneeshaw. I don't object to the commission on that ground at all. I simply think I'm not the man for it. But there's no help if you can get no one else. How often would you wish me to call?'

'If I said as often as you write, I'm afraid your letters would be few and far between. I think you'd better not burden yourself with any fixed arrangement.'

'Well, perhaps it's better for both to leave it open, and then you'll not be disappointed, and I shall be easier about it. I hate work I *have* to do in a certain time, and I've enough of that kind on hand already,' his thoughts reverting to the odious interruptions of the Mac-Gucken, whose image, in turn, suggested tea. 'It's about time we had some tea, though. I say, Kneeshaw, would you mind going in and ordering it?—she'll not fasten on you.'

But she did. Taking for her text the herb tea she had just brewed, she described to George at great length, and in minute detail,

all the means by which she managed to keep her master alive—not omitting the garter nor the red petticoat, which last, it seems, was meant to be wrapped round the head as a cure for a cold. (Lawley in his most savage mood never suspected its being meant for more than a sentimental blanket.) Nor did she confine her care to physical means of recruiting him, but had recourse also to mental stimulants. She never left him too long to himself, as he'd mope and that ; but she would break off often three or four times in the day in the very midst of her cleaning to come in and talk to him and rouse him up a bit like. Yet for all, at times, he'd go that low that even after her talking to him for half-an-hour together he wouldn't look a bit the cheerfuller ! The fact was (this in the mysterious whisper of the keeper of a dangerous lunatic) in his state of health he wasn't fit to be left to himself, and leave him to himself she would not, even if Tuesday's work stared her in the face on Wednesday morning ; not that it ever did or ever would, for work was work, 'choose how'—and no one could say of her that she ever left one day's work atop of another, like that pile of dirty

dinner plates which Sarah Jane should have washed three hours ago ; but there they were, and there they'd be till she took 'em in hand herself, for there was nothing in this house a'most, from the beds to the boots, that she hadn't to follow.'

At this point George pretended to hear Lawley call, and shouting, ' Yes. All right ! ' escaped.

' Lawley, do you know what the red petti coat's for ? ' George had already heard of the abomination from his friend.

' What ? '

' A turban to be wrapped about the head ; she's just told me.'

Lawley's face was a study as he shuddered. It was the face of a man who finds a cockroach in his soup.

CHAPTER XX.

WON BY A NECK.

IT was on Monday George posted his fateful letters. Dr. Clancy on receipt of his on Tuesday morning would at once have hurried off to Mr. Pickles to secure the vacant living for his son Augustine, if he had not unhappily had a class that morning for the study of the early Fathers. This class was attended by most of the curates and by two or three of the vicars of the Wefton churches, who learned at least at it the incalculable importance in the work of the ministry of a minute philological knowledge of these Christian classics. ‘ We are kept four or five years to learn words only, and to tack them together into phrases ; as many more to put larger masses of these into four or five parts ; and other five years at least to learn succinctly to mix and interweave them after some subtle and intricate manner.’ Such

is Montaigne's description of the education of his day, and we have not, perhaps, improved upon it so much as that words, *as words*, are not still the chief study of our impressionable years. Now, let us suppose when a boy reaches manhood that instead of going out into the world and learning there something of those realities of which words are the counters, he remains shut up still within the walls of a school, first as an usher, and then as a schoolmaster—must he not, of course, come at last to think that 'words are things' in a solider sense than Byron's? No man, after a lifelong training of this kind, is to be blamed if he become an absolute slave to mere words. Of course we all are more or less under the dominion of mere words, but owing to their training clergymen very often, and schoolmasters nearly always, are their slaves. Now, words ruled Dr. Clancy, who was an ex-schoolmaster, with a rod of iron. Even the shabby little Greek particle *ἀν*, which had kept them all fussing about her for the whole hour last Tuesday, must have another full hearing this morning to have anything like justice done to her. Mr. Gant, indeed, overhearing a whispered con-

troversy between Mr. Williams and Mr. Snepp about the force of the *τὸ* in the next sentence to that in which the exacting *ἀν* occurred, thought he'd score by shouting across to Dr. Clancy, 'Dr. Clancy, I should like to know the force of the *τό*?'

'Which *τό*?' asked the Vicar petulantly, more than usually impatient that morning of Mr. Gant's confident, but idiotic interruptions.

'The *τό* in the next sentence,' cried the unabashed Gant, having, however, the discretion not to attempt to read the sentence out.

'The next sentence! I didn't know we had got to the next sentence, Mr. Gant. Gentlemen, we're too slow for Mr. Gant. If Mr. Gant will have the kindness to take my place, we shall get on much faster, very much faster, I have no doubt.'

The Vicar treated the Wefton clergy generally, but especially the curates, and more especially his own curates, as fourth-form schoolboys. Mr. Gant having been snuffed out, as far as he could be snuffed out (for he always smouldered and was easily relit), the Vicar resumed his lecture on the inex-

haustible *ἄν*. It seemed at the last lesson they had considerably cleared the ground for to-day's discussion. They had gone over together all the different places of importance in which *ἄν* appeared in the writings of this author, and they seemed at first to be almost in a position to make an exhaustive catalogue of its different uses in his works, and from thence to infer its precise signification in the present passage. But, unfortunately, the thing wasn't such plain sailing as it seemed. For he—the Doctor—could not conceal from them that there were many serious differences of opinion among the best critics as to the use of this particle in the other passages themselves. And, as it was certainly not a matter which he could venture to decide summarily and *ex cathedrâ*, he would first put as fairly as he could before them the conflicting views of these supreme critics, and then hazard his own humble opinion. The Doctor then gave at some length the views on the one side of the question of Hermann and Klotz, and, on the other side, of Hartung, Thiersch, and Buttman, stigmatising, in passing, the views of Thiersch as little short of monstrous. For himself, he

was free to confess that he inclined very strongly to the theory of Hermann; not, of course, accepting it implicitly and in all particulars, but, taking it as a whole, it seemed, in his poor judgment, to come as near the truth as it was possible for us to get in the present state of our faculties and information. Still he would not have them make their mind up on a subject like this without at least consulting also B. Matthiæ in his ‘Lexic. Eurip.’ i. 188 sqq., Brumlein on the ‘Greek Moods,’ and Moller in ‘Schneidewin Philolog.’ vi. 719 ff. Taking, however, for the moment Hermann’s theory as a working hypothesis, they would see that the *āv* in the passage under discussion might have been omitted (and in like cases often was omitted) without in the least degree affecting the sense of the sentence. The Doctor having read the sentence and shown that the mood of the verb made its meaning unmistakable with or without an *āv*, brought that day’s lesson to a satisfactory close.

‘I say,’ said the facetious Tydd as he walked from the vicarage with his bosom friend Smalley, who had taken profuse and profound notes, ‘those notes will come in handy for your

cottage lecture to-morrow night, old fellow! To think that that *beast* of an Ann had no business there after all!'

Meantime the Doctor had detained Mr. Gant when the rest of the class broke up. At first Mr. Gant was very much alarmed by this distinction, and felt that the Doctor was quite capable of setting him an imposition for his irrelevant interruption; but he was reassured by being asked if he would kindly undertake a commission. The fact was, that the Vicar was nearly due to take a grand wedding at the parish church and could not yet, therefore, call upon Mr. Pickles on behalf of his son Augustine. He resolved to write at once to him and entrust the letter to Mr. Gant. He felt that he had been unduly harsh to Mr. Gant and wished now to soothe his hurt feelings by sending him, instead of his buttony page, with the letter.

‘Perhaps you will kindly take this letter to Mr. Pickles for me, Mr. Gant. It is a very important letter, and I wish him to get it as soon as possible. You pass his office, I think? Ah, I thought so. Thank you. By the way,’ as Mr. Gant was leaving the room, ‘I suppose

your colleague, Mr. Kneeshaw, has told you that he's quitting the ministry?'

‘His curacy?’

‘No; the ministry. He's giving the Church up altogether.’

‘What! Has he resigned St. George's?’ cried the amazed Gant.

‘Yes; he has written to say that he cannot conscientiously remain in the ministry. I'm sorry to say, Mr. Gant,’ said the Vicar, sadly shaking his head, ‘he's not leaving it a day too soon—not a day too soon. Good morning, Mr. Gant. Thank you.’

Mr. Gant, as he stood on the steps, felt that he had his fate in his own hands. He had no doubt whatever that the letter he held contained an application to Mr. Pickles to give St. George's to Augustine Clancy. The Vicar grasped at every one's patronage, and was little likely to let this living slip by him without a snatch at it. Mr. Gant's mind was made up in a moment. He hurried to the nearest cab-stand, hailed a hansom, and promised the driver double fare ‘if he reached The Elms in ten minutes.’ The driver earned his premium, and in twenty minutes from the moment of his

engagement he was driving Miss Tubbs to Mr. Pickles' office.

Mr. Gant had told Miss Tubbs that Kneeshaw had resigned St. George's, and, indeed, given up the ministry, and that Dr. Clancy was going to apply for it for his son Augustine; but Mr. Gant had said nothing of the letter which lay in his pocket.

'I shall send my brother to Mr. Pickles after luncheon,' said Miss Tubbs decidedly.

'I'm afraid it will be too late then, Miss Tubbs; the Vicar's letter will be in Mr. Pickles' hands this morning.'

'What kind of a Churchman is this young Clancy?' asked Miss Tubbs.

Mr. Gant was disgusted with this wholly heartless question, but dissembled his disgust and answered carelessly, 'He preaches in his gown on Wednesday evenings.'

This was enough.

'I shall go myself this moment to Mr. Pickles,' cried the aroused patroness. 'The carriage has gone with James. I shall send for a cab.'

'I have a hansom waiting here, Miss Tubbs, if you wouldn't mind making use of one for once.'

‘Mind! It’s just the thing. It’s faster than those creeping cabs. I shall put my bonnet on in a moment,’ and away she bustled, returning in two minutes. ‘You’ll come, Vicar?’

It would not have done, however, for Mr. Gant to have presented Miss Tubbs, himself, and the letter at the same moment to Mr. Pickles.

‘Thank you, I think I’d better not, Miss Tubbs. You could talk me over with more freedom in my absence. I shall walk and meet you on your return.’

Miss Tubbs, as she looked into the weak and foolish face of her *protégé*, thought it as well, perhaps, that Mr. Pickles shouldn’t see him.

‘Very well, Vicar. I shall not be long. *Au revoir.*’ And the masterful little woman took her seat in the hansom with a pleasurable sense that thereby she was shocking the minor proprieties of Wefton.

Mr. Gant had done the one clever and original thing of his life. He felt reasonably elated, but there was one drawback to his exultation—he could not boast of it. There

were a great many people who would have done as he did, if they had had the wit to think of it, but who yet would pronounce this thing, if done by another, dishonourable. The fear of these Pharisees and of Dr. Clancy must keep him silent. Still the consciousness of his cleverness must express itself somehow—if not in words, then in mien and manner. There is somewhere in the *Spectator* a paper of Addison's, describing the airs assumed suddenly by a little girl for no obvious reason. One Sunday morning she comes down with an air of extraordinary pretension and importance, which was maintained throughout the week. It seems that this morning she had put on for the first time a chemise with a lace frill. No one could see this lace frill, and modesty forbade the young lady calling attention to it, but the consciousness of it inspired the dignity of her demeanour. Mr. Gant's grand stroke of policy was like this lace frill, to which he could not call attention, but which added in his own eyes a cubit to his mental stature. He was unusually self-complacent and elated as he walked back briskly to town.

Meantime Miss Tubbs went boldly upon

her bold enterprise. In ten minutes she found herself seated in Mr. Pickles' official sanctum, face to face with that great man, who glowered at her most inhospitably. Women, thought Mr. Pickles, should have fortunes and children ; otherwise they were always useless and sometimes noxious. Miss Tubbs he thought noxious. Miss Tubbs, however, was the last person in the world to be disconcerted by the chilling reception she met. Who was Mr. Pickles that she should cower under his frown ? It was not two months since she had given his nearly naked niece some underclothing.

‘ Mr. Pickles,’ she began, as she made herself perfectly at home by the office fire, ‘ you’re a business man, and I’m a woman of business, and I shall come at once to business, as I know the value of your time. I hear that Mr. Kneeshaw has resigned St. George’s.’

Mr. Pickles had been very much disgusted with George’s letter of resignation that morning. He did not know how to get out of his 1,500*l.* subscription, and what now was there to show for it ? Therefore Miss Tubbs’ subject was as distasteful to him as herself.

‘ Yes ; he’s resigned,’ he answered surlily.

‘I want the living for Mr. Gant, the other curate, the senior curate, of the parish church.

Mr. Pickles merely looked his amazement.

‘Yes,’ continued the imperturbable Miss Tubbs, with a confirmatory nod, ‘I want you to give it to Mr. Gant. I have some claims myself on the patronage, as you know; but I’ve not urged them, and I’m not going to urge them, as I understand from my brother that you bought the appointment from your co-trustees for 1,500*l.* But you know it’s not worth 1,500*l.* to you now, Mr. Pickles, nor 500*l.*; and I thought perhaps you might be glad to sell it again.’

‘Certainly the audacity of this woman is astounding,’ thought Mr. Pickles; ‘and yet—and yet, why not sell it and still get the credit of the appointment, and perhaps of the subscription too? There was, after all, some sense in this cynical way of putting it.

‘Do you mean *you’ll* give the 1,500*l.* to the church if your man is put in, Miss Tubbs?’

‘Certainly not. It is no more worth 1,500*l.* to me than it is to you. Besides, we can’t afford it. You know, Mr. Pickles,’ looking her man steadily in the face, ‘all Mr. Mills’ hands are

his tenants, and last winter, when trade was at its worst, he not only kept them in full work at a very heavy loss to himself, but remitted their rents. I think he was a fool for his pains ; but that's neither here nor there. The money's gone—a dead loss. We've nothing to show for it, unless you call popularity anything—and certainly there isn't a man about the place who wouldn't go through fire and water for Mr. Mills. But popularity is a poor thing, unless,' she corrected herself with a pleasant nod at Mr. Pickles, 'at an election, and to a member. However, there's no use crying over spilled milk. The money's gone, as I say, and we can't afford to throw more after it.'

Mr. Pickles perfectly understood Miss Tubbs' hint. There was no doubt at all that at the approaching election James Mills' hands would vote 'solid' for the candidate of his choice, and there was no doubt either that his choice meant Miss Tubbs' choice. Mr. Pickles began to respect Miss Tubbs as a remarkably clever woman. He must keep her at all costs on his side. After all, 1,500*l.* wasn't much to pay for the three hundred voters she could send

to the poll, even if he could otherwise get out of the promised subscription, which he certainly could not without the loss of as many or more church votes.

‘Your allusion to an election, Miss Tubbs, reminds me how much I owe your brother-in-law. At the last contest I believe every single man in his employ plumped for me. I think that solid vote turned the day. I haven’t forgotten my debt, I assure you, and I shall be glad, Miss Tubbs, if you will take this appointment as part payment.’

‘I’m much obliged to you, Mr. Pickles,’ said Miss Tubbs, not at all effusively. ‘I believe both of us have been committing bribery or simony, or something terrible, but I dare say we shan’t turn Queen’s evidence against each other. Would you kindly let me have a line offering Mr. Gant the appointment, as I should very much like to have the pleasure of handing it to him myself?’

‘Certainly,’ said Mr. Pickles stiffly.

Miss Tubbs’ cynicism and insensibility to his gracious concession were very exasperating. The fact was, Miss Tubbs not only felt little gratitude for a concession extorted at the point

of the bayonet, but still felt sore at the insolent impatience with which Mr. Pickles had endured her at the beginning of their interview.

‘What name did you say?’ asked Mr. Pickles icily.

‘Gant. Hickson Gant. Thank you.’

Having made the offer to Mr. Gant in the curtest possible form of words, and folded and addressed it, Mr. Pickles bowed Miss Tubbs ceremoniously out of his office. ‘After all,’ he thought, as the door closed on her, ‘I should have had to give the 1,500*l.* in any case.’

‘After all,’ thought Miss Tubbs, as the door closed on her, ‘we should have had to vote for Pickles in any case. Tarbutt is such a Radical.’

Miss Tubbs had hardly cleared the town before she saw Mr. Gant afar off, and rising from her seat and grasping with one hand the hood of the hansom, with the other she waved the note triumphantly in the air, to the amazement of the driver. It was not a dignified performance, but Miss Tubbs felt proud of a victory won without the cost of a drop of blood.

‘All right!’ she cried exultingly, as the

driver pulled up at a signal from Mr. Gant. Get in, and I shall tell you all about it.'

'I must go on to Wefton, but I shall be back in half-an-hour,' gasped Mr. Gant, breathless with excitement.

'Well, it's yours ; here's the note.'

Mr. Gant looked this way and that, and, seeing no one, kissed the hand that held the note in a rapture of gratitude. He was hers, body and soul, for the wretched remnant of his life, or her life. However, there was no time to lose now, as Dr. Clancy might call at Mr. Pickles' office on his way from the wedding ; so Mr. Gant, having pressed once more the hand of his benefactress, hastened on to Wefton. Having reached Mr. Pickles' place of business, he went into the outer office, and, giving a clerk the Vicar's letter, with a charge that it should be delivered at once to Mr. Pickles, he hurried back to The Elms.

The Vicar did not call at the office on his way from the wedding, as he had to accompany the bridal party home to breakfast ; nor, indeed, did he get back to his own house till late in the afternoon. Then he found Mr. Pickles' answer awaiting him, and though he

was amazed to learn from it that Mr. Gant had already been offered the living, he never for a moment suspected the trick that had been played him. Indeed, he thought Mr. Gant had been chosen in compliment to himself. Nor do the people of St. George's know to this day why it is they are extreme Ritualists instead of extreme Calvinists, as they would have been if Dr. Clancy had not generously sought to soothe Mr. Gant's hurt feelings by sending him on a message instead of the buttony page. It was simply such

A lucky chance as oft decides the fate
Of mighty monarchs

which gave them the Rev. Hickson Gant for their priest. 'A lucky chance ;' for it is only fair to say of him that he threw his whole heart and soul into his work, until he had in his church every banner, vestment, ornament, and altarcloth necessary to salvation.

Mr. Gant, however, had a stretch of desert to cross before he reached this land of promise. The church he won was new—virgin soil—but the nucleus of the congregation was not new,

but soil which had been sown with tares. While the church was a-building, a weekly service was held in a neighbouring schoolroom to nurse this nucleus into life ; and this service was conducted by what is known in the trade as a ‘guinea-pig,’ that is a clergyman who does Sunday duty at a guinea a service. The guinea-pig, in this instance, was a grammar-schoolmaster, who did not sow either wheat or tares, but chaff only—exceeding dry and empty words. But there was an antediluvian clerk, of whom even St. Peter’s—itself a survival—grew ashamed, and whom they were glad to turn out on the yet unoccupied common of St. George’s: this man sowed the tares. Being appointed to do duty on Sundays as clerk, and on weekdays as Scripture-reader, he came to be held an oracle by the nucleus, and used his influence to propagate his own views. These views were of the same strength and character with those of Mr. Gant, but of the opposite school. Briefly expressed, they came to this: that a choral service, or any service in which the clerk did not make the responses, was popish. His religion was perhaps almost

narrower than Mr. Gant's, but was all the more intense on that account.

Leaving George and Mabel for a moment to their sad adieu, we shall still follow the fortunes of Mr. Gant in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXI.

STRUGGLES OF THE INFANT CHURCH.

Mr. GANT, as we have said, had a short stretch of desert to cross before he reached the land of promise. The nucleus, which consisted of about a score of mothers, two paterfamilias, and a Sunday-school of about fifty children and teachers, was much excited upon hearing from their oracle Hedges, that they had been made over to a popish priest. Hedges discovered his new pastor's religion on the very first Sunday of his appearance amongst them, not from Mr. Gant's monotoning the prayers, for that the old clerk, being very deaf, could not distinguish, but from his rebuking Hedges for his Low-Church pronunciation of 'Amen,'—'eh-men' instead of 'ah-men.' Mr. Gant, who never showed the least regard for anyone's feelings but his own, took the old man very severely to task for this mispronunciation, and even made

him repeat after him two or three times, like a child, the Catholic pronunciation of this shibboleth.

Now 'Amen' is, one may say, an old-fashioned clerk's stock-in-trade, and no such clerk would like being told that the one article in which he had dealt for 'a matter of forty year or more' was spurious or adulterated. But Hedges, having a dim and undefined idea in his mind that his 'Amen' was to a prayer what an indorsement is to a cheque, and that without such indorsement the draft would not be honoured, was really cut to the heart by being told that his indorsement was a forgery. He visited many members of the nucleus in their homes that week and succeeded in arousing a very bitter feeling against Mr. Gant. Indeed, there was a kind of indignation meeting held in Mr. Hedges' house on Thursday evening, at which the matter was discussed with much acrimony. One old lady, a Mrs. Binns, a very small shopkeeper, but one of the most respected members of the nucleus, carried the meeting with her when she explained, what her more ignorant sisters seemed not to have known, that 'Amen' was simply the common Yorkshire

exclamation of awe and wonder. ‘Eh, mun !’ called forth by the beauty of the prayer which preceded it. This settled the question, for, as Hedges pronounced ‘Amen’ precisely as they pronounced ‘Eh, mun,’ if Hedges was wrong, they must be wrong, which was absurd. Hedges himself, of course, knew better,—knew that the ‘Amen’ was the counter-signature without which no prayer could pass ; yet seeing that Mrs. Binns’ etymological criticism, involving as it did ‘an aspersion upon their own parts of speech,’ roused the indignation of the assembly against Mr. Gant to a furious pitch, he diplomatically held his peace. It was unanimously resolved that, as the bitterest revenge that could be taken upon Mr. Gant was for them to give up religion altogether, they would never darken a church door again.

Accordingly, on the following Sunday Mr. Gant had only half the usual congregation to preach to. Mr. Gant was at no loss to account for this lamentable state of things. It never did and never could enter his head that something said or done by him was to blame in any way for anything. This was out of the question. The real reason for the defection

of half the nucleus was, as he explained to Miss Tubbs, that they were never taught church principles. Probably some of them were unbaptized, many unconfirmed, and all untrained in Catholic doctrine. He must begin at the very beginning and find out all the unbaptized children in the place, and christen them in a body on a set Sunday. He must also make the service more attractive by changing the hymn-book and instituting a surpliced choir.

Miss Tubbs, suspecting a more specific cause for the defection of half the congregation, interviewed Hedges, discovered the reason and learned that, as things stood, the introduction of a new hymnal and the institution of a surpliced choir would kill the little life left in the nucleus, and old Hedges himself also, probably. The old man had been all his life used to the dreariest of all dreary hymnals, a compilation called 'Cotterill's.' Out of this he chose seventeen hymns, not because they were the best, but because he knew by heart the first verse of each, and in giving it out was independent of gaslight or spectacles. These seventeen hymns, at the rate of four a Sunday, lasted him a month. Miss Tubbs found that a high-

handed change of the hymnal would alienate utterly and for ever not only Hedges, but the whole congregation, whom Hedges swayed as he would. Yet this insupportable hymnal must be changed. How? She hit upon a happy plan. Hedges was to have the sale of the new book and make threepence profit on each copy sold. If any man in the West Riding could withstand such an argument for the change of a hymn-book, Hedges was not that man. He became a convert in a moment to Mr. Gant's views, and next Sunday, as a consequence, the congregation again appeared in full force. Mr. Gant gave out his notice of a set Sunday for christening all unbaptized children. And Hedges, full of the anticipated profits of his new trade, gave out notice also of having the hymnals on sale. Owing, however, at once to his deafness and to his prepossession, his proclamation rather clashed with his Vicar's, who he naturally imagined was announcing the change of hymnal of which his own mind was full. When, therefore, Mr. Gant gave out notice that 'All those who had unbaptized children should bring them next Sunday to church,' Hedges rose to add, 'And those on

ye who have none may get them at my haase: plain, one shilling; red, with strong backs, one shilling and sixpence.'

This unfortunate mistake threw things back a bit. For as it got abroad outside the circle of the nucleus, many profane wags beset Hedges' house that week demanding peremptorily either a plain baby at a shilling, or, if they weren't in stock, a red one with a strong back for one shilling and sixpence, so that the old clerk was goaded to frenzy.

In this mood Mr. Gant, who had the delicate tact of a bull in a china-shop, comes upon him, and bids him sharply hold his tongue in church in future. He mustn't say even the 'Amens,' for Mr. Gant would have them sung by the Sunday-school children until he got a choir together. Mr. Gant had no sense of the ludicrous, and the only light in which Hedges' mistake struck him was as a breach of the rubric which enjoins that 'nothing shall be proclaimed or published in the church during the time of Divine service but by the minister.' This second attack of Mr. Gant's reconverted the old clerk, and through him half the congregation, to Protest-

antism, and, accordingly, on the following Sunday Mr. Gant found the nucleus minished and brought low again. Again he had recourse to his *Deus ex machinâ*.

‘What have you been doing now?’ asked Miss Tubbs sharply.

‘I! I’ve done nothing.’

‘You’ve not been scolding Hedges again?’

‘Hedges is an idiot,’ cried Mr. Gant with a flash of temper; and proceeded then to the tale of the jumbled notices of last Sunday. Miss Tubbs laughed. Mr. Gant was shocked by her levity. ‘It’s directly against the rubric,’ he said rather sulkily.

‘What? The sale of unbaptized infants?’

‘No; but his giving out any notice during Divine service. There’s an express rubric against it,’ said Mr. Gant, drawing forth triumphantly his Priest’s Prayer Book and pointing out the said rubric to Miss Tubbs. Miss Tubbs for the first time felt some twinges of remorse for putting this poor creature into an important living. She must indemnify the Church by being herself Vicar of St. George’s, retaining Mr. Gant as her curate.

‘You *have* been worrying Hedges, then.’

‘No ; I said nothing to him except that he must hold his tongue during Divine service in future. The Sunday-school children will answer the responses until we have our surpliced choir.’

‘I shall set this thing right, Vicar,’ said Miss Tubbs, too much irritated and too contemptuous to be entertained by her *protégé*’s wooden deadness to everything and everyone but himself and his dignity. ‘I shall set this thing right, Vicar ; but only on condition that you let Hedges alone in future, and that you take no step of any kind without coming first to consult me about it.’

‘I said nothing but what I have told you to Hedges,’ cried Mr. Gant in amazement ; ‘and as for consulting you, Miss Tubbs, I couldn’t think of doing anything without first coming to you.’

‘Send Hedges to me,’ said Miss Tubbs impatiently. ‘Tell him I shall be glad to see him here any time between five and six this evening.’

Miss Tubbs judged that she could impress Hedges more effectually in her own house than in his. Mr. Gant, thus dismissed, went away

cheered with the confidence that his patroness would set all right again, as in truth she did. When Hedges came in the evening, Miss Tubbs soothed the old man with gin-and-water and apologies; asked him how many hymn-books he had sold; promised him an enormous sale when the church was consecrated and open for service, and proceeded then to make interesting and also interested inquiries about his wife and children. She learned in answer to these inquiries that 'Mrs. Hedges was a deal younger than him, but was oined¹ wi' hard work and weshing, and troubled at times wi' the spavins; and that all his children but one were doing for theirsen; this one was a bit declinish and fit for nowt but a schooilmaister, and promised to be a rare scholar. For all he was nobbut twelve year old next August, he could read the clerk's verses of the Psalms faster than he—Hedges—himself, though he'd been forty year and more at 'em.' Upon this our wily diplomatist suggested that it would be as well for Hedges to overlook Mr. Gant's hastiness, as he was very good-natured, and would probably—if he did get up a surpliced

¹ 'Oined,' *i.e.* harassed.

choir—give Mrs. Hedges the washing of the surplices—in itself a fortune, and take the infant phenomenon Hedges into the choir. At any rate Miss Tubbs was prepared to use her influence with Mr. Gant to induce him to confer these favours upon the Hedges family. From this Miss Tubbs proceeded to congratulate the old clerk upon the wonderful work he had done as Scripture reader in the neglected parish, and the good congregations he had got together on Sundays in the schoolroom. Indeed, she had heard so much about it that she was bent upon seeing for herself, and meant to attend the School service next Sunday, and every Sunday till the church was opened. We need hardly say that after this old Hedges relapsed into Popery, and made a most energetic whip to get into the school next Sunday not only all the old attenders, but many new ones. Indeed, candour compels us to confess that the worthy old man's zeal outran his honesty a bit. He not only dropped strong hints of a probable tea-party, 'or summut,' to be given by Miss Tubbs to all the attenders at the school in celebration of the opening of the church; but he borrowed at least a dozen teachers from his old friend and crony, the superintendent of S.

Peter's Sunday Schools, promising to pay them back with interest at the next anniversary sermon at S. Peter's. The result was such a congregation on the next Sunday as would have amazed Mr. Gant if he hadn't preached on the afternoon of the preceding Sunday on the sin of 'forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.' As it was, he wasn't surprised in the least.

In this way the old clerk was brought by Miss Tubbs to adore what he once burned, and burn what he once adored. Nor did he waver in his new faith even when, on the opening of S. George's Church, he was degraded to the position of verger ; for, while his salary remained the same, his own perquisites as seller of the Hymnal, and his wife's as washer of the surplices, were considerable. Besides, he enjoyed the bliss of Longfellow's Village Blacksmith—he heard, or thought he heard, his offspring's voice in the choir.

The choir was another trial to Mr. Gant in the early days of his incumbency. All choirs are trials. 'Certain sorrows and uncertain comforts,' to borrow the Widow Wadman's description of children. But Mr. Gant's choir was

a fiery trial. Miss Tubbs kept her kind promise and dedicated Mark, like an infant Samuel, to the service of the sanctuary. Mr. Gant made his own mental dedication of the youth when Miss Tubbs graciously presented him to the Temple.

‘I don’t think he has much voice or ear, Vicar, but I should like to see him in a cassock and surplice ; and, besides, I think his presence will have a refining influence on the other boys. These common boys are so rough and unruly, you know.’

Certainly Mark had an immense influence on the common boys, not in right only of his innate refinement as a gentleman, but in right also of his audacity and ingenuity. So far as singing went, he was of no use whatever, having absolutely no ear and no voice ; but his conduct and example told with great effect upon ‘his rough and unruly’ fellow-choristers. He succeeded in keeping the boys, and even the men sometimes, awake and attentive during the longest and dreariest of Mr. Gant’s discourses at the school service. On the very first Sunday, too, of the choir’s appearance in St. George’s—the Sunday after the consecration of the church

—Mark's influence made itself felt even beyond the limits of the choir—by the congregation at large, in fact. On this Sunday Dr. Clancy was the preacher, and Mr. Gant, leaning back in his stall, was listening, critical and contemptuous, to his late rector's discourse. Mr. Gant, even in church, couldn't help the thought, 'How lucky some men are, to be sure ! This poor stick of a preacher is vicar of Wefton ,and I merely vicar of S. George's ! ' Mr. Gant forgot that he was yet a young man. Unless the Church revolutionises her present equitable system of promotion, Mr. Gant, at Dr. Clancy's age, will probably be one of her most favoured and famous sons. While, as we say, Mr. Gant with folded legs, folded arms, and head leant backwards against the corner of his stall, was mentally contrasting Dr. Clancy's merit and promotion with his own, not only were the choir, boys and men, on the broad grin, and trying to stanch their laughter with their surplices, but a good part of the congregation in the south transept were no less attentive and lively. Miss Tubbs herself even, who sat in the south transept, was busy burying the wrinkles of a smile in the deeper

wrinkles of a frown. The fact was that Master Mark had been very much struck by the process of nail-making which he had witnessed during the week in a suburb of Wefton, called Claygate, and was now imitating the process with astonishing exactness and more astonishing seriousness. Stretching forth the forefinger of his left hand till it almost touched the fiery head of Mr. Gant, he left it there for a moment to become red hot in the furnace. Then he withdrew it sharply, laid it on the desk as on an anvil, and hammered it with his right fist, now on the back, now on the front, and now on either side, till the nail was made and dropped into its place, when he again thrust his finger into the burning fiery furnace and went through the whole process *da capo*. It was not so much the act itself as the dogged and deadly earnestness of the doing of it—really surprising in a boy of twelve—which upset the due decorum of the choir and those of the congregation who could command a view of it. Presently Mr. Gant, shooting a meaning glance towards Miss Tubbs at some Low Church heresy in the vicar's sermon, found all eyes fixed on something behind him. Looking

round suddenly, he caught all the choir grinning, except Mark, who, gazing upwards with an awed and breathless interest in Dr. Clancy's sermon, had neither eyes, ears, nor thoughts, not to say smiles, for whatever silliness distracted and amused his more profane fellows. Mr. Gant was so struck with the little lad's devotion that, much as he disliked him, he could not help holding him up to the whole choir as an example, after service in the vestry.

‘This child,’ he said, laying his hand on Mark's meek head, ‘this child, and he's only a child, put to shame this morning not merely the boys, but—I must say it—the men of the choir. Boys, I hope you will take example, not by the men of the choir, who set you and the whole congregation so bad an example this morning—but by this child. Mark, my boy, I shall take the opportunity next Sunday of the presence of the whole Sunday School, to present you with a copy of the Holy Scriptures for your excellent and exemplary behaviour during the sermon this morning.’

The presentation, however, was never made. One of the men of the choir was ill-conditioned

enough to turn the tables, and exonerate himself and his colleagues at the expense of poor Mark. In fact, he told the whole story with Yorkshire frankness to Mr. Gant, who, being extremely sensitive about the colour of his hair, was fired with such fury as to insist upon Mark's dismissal from the choir. Miss Tubbs herself, indeed, made but a feeble resistance, as the offence was so flagrant ; and in order to appease Mr. Gant and pave the way for Mark's return at an early date, she affected to feel wroth with the lad, and condemned him to the appalling punishment of sitting with the school-children in the west gallery on the following Sunday.

As it turned out, this hardly mended matters. Mark enjoyed his exile immensely. Nor was this all—he made others enjoy it also. Even in that S. Helena he made his influence felt. Mr. Gant preached after the fashion of a hen drinking. He bent down, took a sip from his MS., and then lifted up his head to heaven, stooping again for another sip, and again, as it seemed, returning thanks for the delicious draught. On the following Sunday morning, while in the middle of his sermon and in the

middle of a sip, his head just being raised above the horizon is arrested and gorgonised. The half-finished sentence falters and flutters and drops dead in mid flight, like a shot bird. There, opposite to him, he sees, or thinks he sees, old Hedges being translated to heaven, as it were piecemeal and in numbers. At least his hair is soaring aloft of itself in the most mysterious manner—Hedges himself the while bald as a coot, sitting listening seemingly with all his ears to Mr. Gant's dreary discourse, utterly unconscious that

his fell of hair
Did at this dismal treatise rouse and stir,
As life were in 't.

In fact, the old man never looked more absorbed in devout attention, for he was counting up the profits of his week's sale of Hymnals. Mr. Gant's sudden silence opened dozing eyes and fixed wandering attention on himself for a moment; next moment his wild stare turned every eye in church to the west end. There they see, bald as a billiard-ball, old Hedges looking preternaturally devout while his head of hair rises, still and steady as a balloon, towards the ceiling. At first everyone was

too amazed to laugh.; but when the wig, coming down suddenly by the run plop in the old clerk's face, was identified by him and clapped in much confusion on his head, it was wholly impossible for anyone to keep his countenance. Mr. Gant had, in fact, to bring one of his best sermons to a sudden, lame, and impotent conclusion. It was Mark of course. He had made war with fire and sword upon old Hedges' wig during the rehearsals in the school-room—sometimes clipping it with a pair of scissors, but more often singeing it, and then sending the unconscious victim to find out where the smell of burnt hair came from. For Hedges stood in awe of Miss Tubbs' nephew. This morning the sight of his old enemy, the wig exactly underneath, and the presence in his pocket of a new fishing-line, &c., which he had brought with him to church as a help to fix his serious attention, suggested the brilliant idea of hooking and hauling up the wig. Just as he was about landing it the sudden silence and the sight of the eyes of the whole congregation fastened on his handiwork unnerved him. He dropped the wig with the line and hooks attached into Hedges' face, who,

catching it incautiously and clapping it hastily on his head, got one of the hooks embedded in the palm of his hand. He had to lean pensively with his head upon his hand for the rest of the service, since, if he moved his hand, his wig must come away with it. As the congregation filed past him out of church and saw him, instead of opening the doors, sitting still with his head upon his hand, the picture of misery, they thought the shock had affected his mind, and gave him a wide and safe berth. Mark, however, now no longer disconcerted, came to him in something of a temper. He was not pleased to find the hook so fixed in Hedge's hand that it would take some time and trouble to extricate it. While busy upon this operation—abusing the old clerk the while for a muff and a mole—Miss Tubbs and Mr Gant came upon them, and Miss Tubbs, to her honour be it spoken, reprimanded Mark, and even took the fishing-line from him, nor did she restore it till they got home. Mr. Gant, it will be seen, had his troubles in the first days of his incumbency, and troubles, too, of an appropriately heroic kind. A man with high aims must reckon upon high obstacles.

CHAPTER XXII.

MABEL'S REPRIEVE.

IT is time we returned to Mabel. She at once fell in with George's decision to emigrate to Australia because it was George's. She even began to see advantages in the scheme, and among others this—that when he returned to his faith and his profession he might work as a missionary among the heathen. Of his return to his faith and his profession she was assured. George shunned the subject, but talked hopefully of his plans and prospects as a farmer. He felt the relief of a man who has roused himself by a supreme effort from a nightmare, and he never now passed the parish church without something of the feeling with which a released prisoner passes under the walls of his late prison. On the other hand, Mabel's utter self-forgetfulness deepened his remorse for his selfishness in involving her fate with his own.

He kept his pledge not to recur to this side of the subject in her presence, but she could see and interpret truly the cloud that settled now and again on his brow. At such times she would speak in the lightest and cheerfulness way of life in Australia as the happiest of happy projects, and draw pleasant and humorous pictures of it put together out of books on Australia she had taken to reading. Thus they spent hours each day together, uninterrupted and unprevented by Miss Masters. Mabel flattered herself that her aunt's indulgence was due to her own eloquent pleading for a continuance of her approval of their engagement, but in truth it had quite another origin, which we had better explain here. Mabel had wisely prevented George announcing his resignation to her aunt, as she knew his self accusations would only suggest a text for her aunt to preach upon. She took the thing in hand herself and broached it to her aunt as a commonplace piece of news. Her aunt's first idea was that George had been compelled to resign for some iniquity. 'Why has he been forced to resign?' she asked, prepared to be shocked by some scandal.

‘He has not been forced to resign, Aunt. He has resigned of his own accord. He is quitting the Church altogether.’

Light now began to break in upon Miss Masters. Mr. Kneeshaw, whom she had long suspected of ritualism, was going over to Rome.

‘Going to be a priest!’ she cried in horror. ‘It was a mercy you weren’t married to him. You’d have had to become a nun!’ This fate seemed even more horrible than that of a clergyman’s widow, as the widow, at least, hadn’t to wear an outrageous costume.

‘No; he’s not going over to Rome, Aunt. He’s quitting the Church, that’s all.’

‘But why?’

‘There are some things he had to preach as a clergyman which he didn’t quite believe.’

‘But he might have paid a curate to preach them. It’s a good living.’ This suggestion was unanswerable and unanswered. Miss Masters, having paused in vain for a reply, resumed: ‘What is he going to do, then?’

‘He’s thinking of going to Australia.’

‘To Australia!’ In Miss Masters’ young and impressionable days Australia was known

chiefly as a model moral sewage farm fertilised by our felons. Hence her horror. 'What takes him to Australia ? '

'He is going to turn farmer there.'

This didn't put a better aspect on the case. Miss Masters had in her mind's eye but one picture of a farmer—a Lincolnshire lout, with one very dirty hand scratching his head and the other holding his hat (reverentially removed in her honour), while his wife—draggled and depressed, with a half-peeled potato in one hand and a broken knife in the other—accompanied every fourth word with a curtsey, with the regularity of an orchestral conductor beating time.

'All I can say is you're well quit of him ; ' and she said it most decidedly.

'But I'm not quit of him, Aunt.'

'Do you mean to say he insists on holding you to your engagement ? '

'No ; he would have given me up with everything else if I had let him. But I wouldn't let him.'

At last the truth dawned on Miss Masters. This was George's ingenious, if not ingenuous, mode of jilting Mabel. That he should change

his mind about her in a week seemed improbable, but not as improbable as that he should change his mind in a week about his life-long creed and convictions.

‘Ah!’ she exclaimed, ‘I see. I couldn’t have believed it. Only a week engaged! It’s abominable. I should—— Has he private means?’

Mabel was puzzled by her aunt’s excitement. ‘Very little.’

‘He *says* he has very little, I dare say. Still, it’s no use, my dear; you can’t help yourself; you must let him go; it wouldn’t do to take it into court, you know; the scandal; and *I* should have to give evidence like that I gave at the inquest upon the drunken man we ran over at Clifton. I couldn’t do that again for anybody—not for anybody. No, no, my dear, he has behaved abominably to you, but there’s no help for it; you must let him go.’

Mabel at last took in her aunt’s flattering view of the situation—that George wished to get rid of his engagement at any sacrifice of fortune, and that she, at any sacrifice of self-respect, wished to keep him to it. It was a generous construction of their motives and

mutual position. She generally dutifully endured her aunt's silliness, or met it sportively, but this was too trying, as it profaned George's love no less than her own.

' You do not understand,' she said contemptuously.

Her aunt, interpreting the words by the tone in which they were uttered, took them as a reflection on her old-maidenly ignorance of affairs of the heart—a viperous stab in the most vital part—her *amour propre*.

' No, *I* was never jilted,' she retorted venomously.

' You do not understand, aunt ; ' repeated Mabel, with quiet dignity, not now contemptuous. Her aunt's retort had the effect only of making her feel it ' weakness to be wroth with weakness.' ' George has no wish to break off his engagement.'

' Why, then, should he give up the living and offer to give you up at the same time ? ' she asked triumphantly. When her vanity—that is the profoundest depths of her soul—was stirred, the waters took a time to settle.

' Well, then, Aunt,' said Mabel in despair, ' I shall take your advice. When next he

comes I shall tell him that I am willing to release him from his engagement.'

'That's the proper course, Mabel,' replied her aunt with much dignity.

'But suppose he should still continue to come?' Mabel asked anxiously.

'There's not much fear of that,' with a nod of the most perfect self-complacency.

She was absolutely absorbed in the contemplation of her own shrewdness, to the exclusion of all thought of the agony of wounded love and pride which her niece must be enduring if this construction of George's conduct were the true one. There is no callousness like the callousness of vanity. There is some hope of getting into an inhospitable house, but none of getting into one full to overflowing, and a churlish heart is more sympathetic than a vain one which is crowded-out with thoughts of self.

When, however, George came not only every day, but twice a day, Miss Masters began at last and with reluctance to think she had wronged him, and we need not say that this consciousness did not dispose her more favourably towards him. In the first place, 'he ne'er

pardons who has done the wrong,' and in the second place George's constancy convicted her of error in a matter in which she considered herself an expert. When a whole week of such visiting put the thing beyond question, she recurred to the subject, on which Mabel had kept a discreet silence. Even now, however, Miss Masters had no idea of admitting a mistake. She affected to think she had desired Mabel to break off the engagement, and not merely to permit it to be broken off.

‘Mr. Kneeshaw has been here again to-day, Mabel?’

‘Yes, Aunt.’

‘I thought you agreed with me that the engagement had better be broken off’

‘If he wished it broken off.’

‘If *he* wished it! My dear, no girl of proper spirit should care what a man wished’—this was lofty and sweeping—‘I dare say he'd wish you to go to Australia like a felon, and peel potatoes,’ an allusion, not to the chief industry of Botany Bay, but to the occupation in which she had surprised her Lincolnshire farmer's wife.

‘He doesn’t wish me to go to Australia, Aunt—at least, not now.’

‘It doesn’t matter when, if he wishes you to go. I never heard of any decent person going to Australia, Mabel—never; and if he has to go, depend upon it there’s a reason for it,’ with a nod which suggested forgery at least.

Mabel stood silent, with her elbow leaning on the mantelpiece and her head upon her hand, looking down upon her aunt, who, in the intervals of her utterances, was painting away unconcernedly. The girl yearned for a mother’s sympathy, and this was the nearest approach to it within her reach

‘I think, perhaps, you had better write to him to say that all is over between you, Mabel. It is more satisfactory than an interview, you know, and easier too.’

‘I love him, Aunt.’ The words were in themselves little likely to impress Miss Masters, but the tone in which they were uttered disclosed even to her a shocking depth of feeling.

‘My dear !’ exclaimed Miss Masters, looking fearfully towards the door, which might have been ajar, or behind which some eaves-

dropper might have heard the degrading confession.

‘Yes; I love him. I cannot do it,’ said Mabel miserably.

‘My dear Mabel!’ again exclaimed her scandalised aunt, looking this time her horror through her double eyeglass levelled at her niece. ‘Such feelings are most unbecoming in a young girl—most unbecoming. Love a man who says he is willing to give you up and who is going to Australia! It is shocking! What will your father say? A farmer, too! A thing we never had in our family! To say you love him in that tone! It’s not modest—it’s not, indeed. I must see your father about it this very day.’

‘Do not take it from me!’ cried Mabel, in a tone of agonised entreaty. She felt that her very life lay in the hands that wielded her father’s authority. ‘Do not take it from me. It’s everything—it’s the only thing I have in the world. Do not take it from me.’ She had stepped to the table where her aunt sat, and stood opposite her with her hands clasped and wrung hard together, and an expression of intense and pained suspense in her face.

Before her aunt could answer, the door opened and the servant announced Mr. Sagar.

Mr. Sagar, following close upon the maid, took in the situation at a glance. Mabel had told him of George's resignation and of his resolution to emigrate to Australia, and he had doubly endeared himself to her by his generous approval and appreciation of George's motives. In fact, Mabel had come to look on Mr. Sagar and to confide in him as a father—a filial regard which poor Bob Sagar was fain to be content with. For himself, he had enough regard of another than the paternal kind for Mabel to make his praise of George and his advocacy and furtherance of the lover's plans nothing short of magnanimous. The truth is, Mr. Sagar was an Irishman, and anything chivalrous had a fascination for him. An Irishman may have no more idea than a woman of justice, but of generosity he has as high an ideal as any man in the world. What could be more generous than to forward the suit of a successful rival? No one had better reason than Bob Sagar to know that it was absurd to speak of rivalry between himself and George Kneeshaw; that he did not love Mabel with a

lover's intensity ; that George had won her before he appeared ; and that even if George was out of the field altogether, it was in the last degree improbable that Mabel could ever have been brought to care for a man twice her age. Mr. Sagar, if he looked the thing fairly in the face, would have been forced to confess this ; but an Irishman is not given to looking unflattering facts fairly in the face, and Mr. Sagar preferred to regard George as a successful rival. Now the magnanimity of helping a rival to gain his mistress's hand had an irresistible fascination for so chivalrous an Irishman as Bob Sagar. It seemed an heroic thing to do, and was therefore done with all the greater glow and zest.

Mr. Sagar, as we said, following closely upon Jane's heels, took in the situation at a glance. He felt certain Mabel had been making a despairing appeal to her aunt to renew her approval of their engagement under the altered circumstances of the case, and he resolved to do all he could to reinforce her appeal. His help was not to be despised. For, we need hardly say, perhaps, that the moment Mr. Sagar appeared on the scene Miss Masters set her

cap at him, and was by this time absolutely certain that a proposal was only a question of time. Why else should he call day after day, and sometimes sit *tête-à-tête* with her for half-an-hour together? It was true. The wretched man's visits were occasionally so ill-timed that Mabel was either out or reading for her father, and he would have to endure the aunt for half-an-hour for the sake of five minutes with the niece at its close. When Mr. Sagar was announced, Miss Masters, having hurriedly snatched off her double eye-glass, rose and advanced graciously to greet him, and in reseating herself took care to have her back to the light. Mr. Sagar having returned the aunt's greeting in his genial, jovial way, took Mabel's hand, and, having shaken it, led her by it to the dcor. 'I have brought you a box of bonbons, child,' he said, with a meaning look. 'Go; you'll find them in the "nursery." Don't be greedy.'

Mabel knew at once it was George. He and Mr. Sagar had entered the house together, and Mr. Sagar had sent him to the 'nursery' with the promise that Mabel would join him there. If, however, Mabel was at no loss to

interpret Mr. Sagar's words, neither was Miss Masters. She had no doubt at all that Mabel was sent away as *de trop*, and that the expected proposal was upon her.

'It makes us long to be young again when we see these young folks billing and cooing, Miss Masters, doesn't it?' said Mr. Sagar, opening the campaign as he thought very brilliantly by speaking of the old lady as his coeval, that is, knocking twenty years at least off her age. This is coming promptly to the point, thought Miss Masters.

'I—I don't know,' she stammered, as modest and embarrassed as if the proposal itself underlay Mr. Sagar's words.

'But you feel a kind of sympathy with them, don't you, eh?' urged Mr. Sagar, thinking 'what a confirmed and confounded old prude she is, to be sure.'

'Oh, Mr. Sagar, women are weak creatures,' glancing up timidly for a moment into Bob's amazed face, and then casting down her modest eyes.

Bob was nonplussed. He was on the wrong scent altogether. It never entered his head that this old thing could be dreaming of

a husband, to say nothing of him. He thought it was just the other way, that she was so inveterate a prude as to affect an aversion to the very memory or mention of love, and that she was praying him not to press his appeal on behalf of Mabel and Kneeshaw. In fact, the mind of each was so fully prepossessed with its own idea that there was no room in it for the idea of the other.

‘Come, come, Miss Masters, you can’t be so cruel as to cross the course of true love,’ pleaded Bob in a wheedling tone, putting his hand out to touch the back of hers.

‘I—I don’t know what to say.’

‘Say “yes,” and make two people happy for life,’ said Bob, quite pleased with the enemy’s wavering at the very first onset.

Miss Masters’ heart leaped within her. ‘At last!’ She had, however, silly as she was, the woman’s instinct against cheapening herself. A little tantalising made the prize more precious. With her eyes downcast upon the paint-brush she was nervously fingering with both hands, she faintly whispered: ‘But the acquaintance is so short, Mr. Sagar.’

‘There isn’t much time to lose, you know,

said Bob, alluding to George's immediate emigration.

Miss Masters thought it an uncalled-for and ungracious allusion to her age. She would punish him by withholding her consent a little longer.

‘No, I don’t think I dare ; I don’t, indeed,’ she said, pronouncing each fatal word slowly and staccato.

‘Do you mean your brother would be angry?’ asked the perplexed Bob.

‘It’s no business of my brother’s,’ she replied sharply, thinking that Mr. Sagar was taking her own willingness too much for granted.

‘I thought, perhaps, he might have just a little to say to it,’ said Bob drily. She must be the devil’s own tartar, he thought, if she has reduced Masters to meekness.

‘No ; he has nothing to say to it,’ still tartly.

‘Then it’s all right,’ said Bob cheerily. ‘You’ll not have the heart to hold out, Miss Masters. It isn’t in you. You must consent. You will, won’t you?’

‘You’ll always be kind to me, Robert?’ she

said in a timid and touching voice, looking up pleadingly into Bob's face. For a moment he thought her mad, next moment, with an Irish quickness, he took in the situation. 'Miss Masters!' he exclaimed, starting up suddenly as if stung.

'Call me "Rebecca,"' she said softly, taking his exclamation for an expression of joy, and his sudden rising as the first move of an approaching embrace.

'Certainly; I'll call Rebecca with pleasure,' said Bob with extraordinary presence of mind, hurrying to the door and affecting to think 'Rebecca' was the name of Miss Masters' maid. 'Rebecca!' he cried at the top of the stairs and at the top of his voice, 'Miss Masters wants you,' and descended the stairs three steps at a time, not stopping to draw breath or bridle till he reached the road.

Here he leaned against a wall, and first laughed immoderately, then, we regret to say, swore and then laughed again till the tears came. 'Faith, it was a narrow squeak, though,' he said once more, turning serious as he walked away. '"Call me Rebecca!"' Here Mr. Sagar stopped again to pinch himself

and make sure it was not a horrible nightmare. 'Faith, you must be getting old, Bob Sagar, when grim death can stare you in the face like that!' Thus meditating, Mr. Sagar hurried to his hotel, consulted a time-table, called for his bill, packed his portmanteau, wrote a short note to Mabel, threw himself into a cab, and never felt quite safe till he found himself well under way in the Great Northern express for London.

Meantime Ariadne, thus abruptly abandoned by Theseus, was by no means in despair. Quite the contrary. She was exultant. She had no doubt at all that Mr. Sagar had misunderstood her—hadn't heard her distinctly—for she spoke soft and low as became a maiden, timid and tremulous as an aspen leaf stirred by the first breathings of spring. Under the wrong impression, then, that she had finally refused him, the wretched man had rushed away in a frenzy of despair. It was to be hoped he would do no violence to himself. If not, the thing was remediable and should be remedied. When Mabel returned to the drawing-room, she found her aunt too full of triumph and transport to be unamiable. Besides, the old lady felt that if Mabel was to

be on her side in her love affair, she must be on Mabel's side in this business, bad as it was, of that felonious farmer, George Kneeshaw.

‘Have you written to Mr. Kneeshaw, Mabel?’

‘No Aunt,’ said Mabel, looking up piteously for her death-warrant.

‘Well, my dear, if it is such a pain to you to part with him, I cannot ask you to give him up.’

Mabel could hardly trust her ears. ‘Dearest Aunt,’ she cried, as she kissed the old lady with much fervour, ‘how can I thank you?’

‘My dear, I could not ask you to do what would break your heart.’

Here was a sudden conversion! Nor was Miss Masters less exultant and amiable an hour later when Mabel read Mr. Sagar’s note to her.

‘Mr. Sagar’s gone!’ exclaimed Mabel, when she opened the note.

Miss Masters was not in the least surprised.

‘What does he say?’ she asked excitedly.

‘He says “he has had most unexpectedly to hurry off to town, and that what has taken him there will prevent his return. But he hopes that I shall write regularly and tell him

all that happens, as there's nothing he'll be so anxious to hear as news from me." And then he gives his London address. I am so sorry,' said Mabel, suddenly saddened again.

'My dear, he'll be back soon,' said Miss Masters, with a roguish nod and smile which Mabel was wholly at a loss to interpret.

Miss Masters took the letter from her, noted the address, and made use of it in directing that evening the following recall to the happy Mr. Sagar. It read like an advertisement in the agony column of the *Times*. 'Come back. I did not know my own heart. You alone of all have touched it. Come back to your Rebecca.' Though Bob did not come to Rebecca, yet Miss Masters could not recall her reapproval of Mabel's engagement, given under the fond delusion of her own love affair, and thus the lovers were allowed to spend the last few sad and sweet days together unmolested.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A STORM IN A TEACUP.

GEORGE's resignation created a stir in Wefton generally, but a storm in the parish church. George was popular with the poor, and with most of the Sunday School teachers. Those young ladies, indeed, who attended the Sunday School with mixed motives, not so much from love of souls generally as from love of souls swathed in cassock waistcoats, rather feared than liked him. He was cynical and satirical, they said, and they felt that he saw through and through them. But the other teachers and all the children worshipped him with that kind of hero-worship which any kindly clergyman can win by a little sympathy and self-sacrifice. Accordingly, when the news spread of his promotion to S. George's, there was an outburst of feeling in the schools and parish very creditable to both pastor and people, which of course

sought expression in the usual presentation. Notwithstanding that the times were not good, and Dr. Clancy looked askance and sour at the movement, a considerable sum was subscribed before George's next step, his resignation not only of the curacy, but of S. George's and of the ministry itself, became generally known. Dr. Clancy at once thought, and was pleased to think, that this startling news would put an end to the project and put to shame its promoters. But it didn't. Such was the ignorance or apathy of the poor concerning real religion, that sympathy was rather deepened than deadened by the report, which got about in a day, that Mr. Kneeshaw was giving up everything—income, position, and prospects—for conscience sake. Subscribers increased their subscriptions, new subscribers in numbers gave in their names, and only very few were Christian enough to take the view of Dr. Clancy and Mr. Gant, that Mr. Kneeshaw was a criminal of the deepest dye.

We have too much respect for Dr. Clancy and Mr. Gant to quote here their conversations upon this terrible Kneeshaw scandal. Nay, we shall even refrain through the same motive

from giving the views on the subject of an old woman, a great friend of Mabel's, who understood from Mr. Gant that Mr. Kneeshaw had stabbed his mother in church because she was a Catholic. This old lady had a poor opinion of Catholics, that is, of the Irish ; ‘ they were druffen folk, an’ ommost allus fratchin’, still a man’s mother wor his mother, choose how ; ’ and, the old woman being herself a mother, abused George to Mabel with a clerical zest and zeal. But the abuse was so like that of Dr. Clancy and Mr. Gant, that in respect for them and their cloth we decline to print it.

We must, however, as it has a bearing on our story, say something of the practical effects of Dr. Clancy’s feelings towards George as they showed themselves in his opposition to the proposed presentation.

No one was more scandalised by the movement than Mr. Gant, in part because the presentation was to be to a heretic, but chiefly because it was not to be to himself, who also was about to leave the parish church. Hearing, then, Mr. Sherlock stigmatise George’s desertion of the Church as ‘ a kind of matricide,’ and Dr. Clancy describe all subscribers to the presenta-

tion as 'accessories after the fact to his offence,' Mr. Gant bustled about repeating and exaggerating after his manner these two statements to all he met or visited. Some, like Mabel's old friend, somewhat misunderstood him ; others understood him, but disagreed with him ; and only a few could be brought to see the thing from anything near his standpoint. Accordingly the movement was not in the least checked by Mr. Gant's crusade, and he had to report to Dr. Clancy that this disgraceful scandal to the Church was being promoted by almost all the Sunday School teachers, and that a meeting to fix the day and form of the presentation was to be held the next evening in the Parish Church schools.

'This thing should be stopped, Dr. Clancy.'

'It shall be stopped,' cried the Doctor, who was a dictatorial little man. 'You will attend the meeting, Mr. Gant, and let it know *my* views on this subject.'

'Yes?' replied Mr. Gant, interrogatively, expecting the Doctor to arm him with a more formidable weapon than his views on the subject. Hadn't they heard Mr. Gant's views unmoved?

‘Tell them plainly what *I* think about it, Mr. Gant,’ repeated the Doctor, at a loss to interpret Mr. Gant’s expectation of further instructions.

‘But suppose they still persist in going on with it?’

The Doctor thought Mr. Gant had waxed fat and kicked since his appointment to S. George’s, and that the audacious suggestion was ill-disguised insolence. ‘Be good enough, Mr. Gant, to follow my instructions, and we shall hear no more of the matter,’ he said sharply, in a manner at once offended and offensive, and dismissed Mr. Gant by the simple process of turning his back upon him.

Mr. Gant attended the meeting, and expressed the Doctor’s views, as it were, through a speaking-trumpet; exaggerating Dr. Clancy’s abhorrence of George’s offence, and his disgust with those who showed plainly that they condoned or approved of it by their promoting the presentation. Mr. Gant’s language was so strong, wild, and metaphorical, that many of the teachers and others present were at last convinced that Mr. Kneeshaw must have committed some crime unmentioned, because it was

unmentionable, which forced him to resign S. George's and quit the ministry.

Now many of the teachers were factory girls ; and there is no known mode of advertisement comparable to getting together thirty or forty factory girls, one from each mill in the town, and telling them a piece of scandal. At 6.30 the next morning it will be in every mouth in every mill, and at 6.30 next evening it will be sown in six thousand households, each itself a hotbed for its propagation in its neighbourhood.

Now of course in each factory there is a church faction and a chapel faction, who battledore the shuttlecocks of ecclesiastical scandals back and forwards with polemical moderation and mildness. To the chapel faction this unknown and unnameable wickedness of a church parson was a welcome weapon. It was all the more handy and horrible for being unknown. The dullest imagination can picture more horrors 'than vast hell can hold,' and is sure at any rate to fill a blank with its own favourite sin. But, we need not say, that as the chapel hands grew more and more horrible in their hints, and certain in their conclusions, the

church hands, who had themselves set the thing afloat, repented them of their lack of charity, and began to doubt a scandal which was flung back in their own faces. As often as not in Church, State, and Society, a devil is cast out by the help of a devil. Many of these girl teachers, then, finding themselves hoist with their own petard, became on a sudden cautious and charitable, and agreed to see the superintendents of the Sunday Schools, and set them upon ascertaining from Mr. Gant what the crime was of which he gave such horrible hints. The superintendents, nothing loth, presented themselves that evening at Mr. Gant's lodgings as a deputation from the schools, to ask Mr. Gant to put in writing his charges against Mr. Kneeshaw. Mr. Gant was amazed and confounded. He had made no charges against Mr. Kneeshaw. 'What! not the other night at the meeting?' 'No. He had said at the meeting merely that Mr. Kneeshaw was an Atheist, or an Infidel, or at all events didn't believe what the Church believed.' 'Mr. Gant would not mind, then, attending another meeting and making this explanation to it?' 'Mr. Gant wouldn't mind.'

Now the best service you can do a man is to spread about him some infamous calumny which can soon and certainly be disproved; for of course, in the reaction an unpopular man becomes popular, and a popular man heroic. This was the service Mr. Gant did Mr. Kneeshaw. When he was forced to explain at the second meeting that Mr. Kneeshaw's crime consisted in not believing what the Church believed, that is, what Mr. Gant believed, that is (in the judgment of the superintendents, both grim Protestants) what the Pope believed, the enthusiasm for Mr. Kneeshaw and against Mr. Gant rose to fever heat. Mr. Gant was absolutely hissed, and rushed off in a rage to report to his rector.

Meanwhile the meeting, having buzzed a bit like an angry hive, settled down to arrange about the time, place, and character of the presentation. The first question was whether it should be a purse of sovereigns *and* a timepiece or piano, or a purse of sovereigns alone. There was some captious objection to the piano, on the grounds that Mr. Kneeshaw didn't play, wasn't married, and couldn't take it about with him easily to or in Australia. The timepiece

was popular, and would have carried the day, but for the unfortunate fact that there were *two* watchmakers among the subscribers, and it was not possible to order the clock from either or neither without offence. Besides a piano and a timepiece, the only presentation that had been made, and was therefore conceivable by unimaginative and precedent-ridden Yorkshire folk, was a work-box ; but the strong good sense of the meeting held this an inappropriate present to a bachelor. There remained, therefore, only the other alternative of a purse of sovereigns in its naked simplicity, which finally was carried unanimously. As for the day, as Monday and Tuesday were 'washing days,' Wednesday service night, Thursday baking, and Friday 'fettling day,' Saturday was carried without discussion. As for the place, of course it should be presented in the school, and equally of course, after a tea-party. There remained only the arrangements for the tea. Just at this point of the proceedings Mr. Gant returned, held a hasty conference with the superintendents, and marched off again with an air of no little triumph. The senior superintendent then announced to the breathless meeting that he

and his colleague were sent for by Dr. Clancy but would return soon and communicate the conference and its result. This announcement created a great sensation in the House, which remained in a very excited state till the return of its leaders from the foot of the throne. We must explain what took place there. Mr. Gant, as we have said, rushed off to the Vicar to complain of the indignity done to him, Mr. Gant. If he could have emptied himself of himself for a single moment, he would of course have represented the indignity as done in his person to the Doctor, whose ambassador he was, and thus secure the violent revenge he was hot for. But Mr. Gant could no more get himself out of his mind for a moment than he could leap away from his own shadow. However, as the Doctor happened to be a self-important little man, this did not much matter. The insult of which Mr. Gant gave, as usual, an exaggerated account, would not have seemed to Dr. Clancy terrible if it had not glanced off Mr. Gant and touched himself. This was terrible.

‘ Do I understand you to say, Mr Gant, that when you told them of my disapproval of

this scandalous subscription they hissed you?' asked the appalled vicar.

'They hissed my whole speech!' cried Mr. Gant, as if this was the superlative of the positive insult the Doctor incredulously questioned.

'Did they know, Mr. Gant, that you were expressing *my* views on the subject?' asked the Doctor, pale but composed.

'Certainly; I said I came there at your request to tell them what you thought about it.'

There was a solemn silence, broken at last by the Doctor's saying in an awful voice, 'Send the men to me.'

'The superintendents?'

'Yes.'

'Now?'

'If you find them still in school, Mr. Gant. Thank you. Good night.'

Hence the summons to the superintendents. Mr. Lightowers, the senior superintendent, was a difficult man to deal with. He was a grocer, but of an ungrocer-like mien and manner. An immense man, slow of intellect, speech, and movement, with a face like a full moon, gashed

by an enormous mouth. When he smiled there seemed no room for another smile in the school. But he seldom smiled, or indeed opened his mouth except to eat or drink. He swallowed an idea as slowly as a snake crushes, lubricates, and sucks down a rabbit, and took a snake's time to digest it. But there was one thing harder than to get an idea into his head—to get one out of it; for his mind was like a missionary box; you might get one thing at a time with some difficulty into it, but hardly any amount of shaking would get a thing out. Possibly his vast height made him seem so slow. Sounds took so long to reach him. After you had talked to him for five minutes on various subjects, he answered only your first sentence. He might have answered the last sentence next day, perhaps, if you had come upon him at the precise moment of its reaching him. ‘His soul was like a star and dwelt apart.’ It was so high up that it gave little light, and that little took long to travel. He had already overtaken the idea that Mr. Kneeshaw was leaving the parish church, and that a presentation was to be made to him; and he had got abreast of the idea of his giving

up S. George's and the ministry, his reason therefor and Mr. Gant's rage thereat ; but Dr. Clancy's feeling in the matter was not yet quite clear to him. It was clear to his colleague, Mr. Garside, who, though no genius, was brighter than Mr. Lightowlers, to whose judgment, however, Mr. Garside deferred sincerely as to a man whose father had left him 4,000*l.* These two dignitaries, we may say in passing, were not the superintendents of the main and mother parish church schools, but of an outlying daughter in Mr. Kneeshaw's charge.

‘Summat up?’ said Mr. Garside interrogatively, as the two left the school together. Wefton folk are the most terse and laconic speakers in the world.

‘Summat up?’

After some seconds' deliberation Mr. Lightowlers replied, ‘Ay.’

‘Happen it's t' presentation?’ again interrogatively.

Mr. Lightowlers, after half a minute's consideration, replied ‘Ay.’

‘He's agin it,’ resumed Mr. Garside, referring to Dr. Clancy ; but Mr. Lightowlers,

understanding him to refer to Mr Gant, was again able, after a few seconds' pause to reply, 'Ay.'

As Mr. Garside was himself slow and weighty of speech, this conversation lasted them till they reached the vicarage and prepared Mr. Lightowlers for the subject of the Doctor's lecture. It was as well that he was so prepared, not merely because his mind was slow to turn as a tortoise, but because the Doctor was not pompous in speech, but short and sharp rather.

Mr. Lightowlers no sooner filled the doorway of the study with his enormous person than the Doctor flew straight at his throat so to speak.

'Good evening, gentlemen. Am I to understand that you persist in making a presentation to my late curate, Mr. Kneeshaw, in the teeth of my express disapproval ?'

Here the Doctor paused for a reply, which Mr Lightowlers was able to make with unusual promptitude. He was prepared for the question about the presentation, and answered, after a moment or two, without thought, 'Ay.'

It was not the answer itself, but the manner

of the answer, that was maddening. Mr. Lightowlers would have some difficulty in digesting the Doctor's fine language, even if he had taken time in the process ; but as he had the idea of the presentation already in his mind, and the answer on the tip of his tongue, he shot it out after only a second's pause, and long before he could have mastered the spirit of the question. Therefore he grunted 'Ay' with a placid indifference a thousand times more exasperating than expressed insolence.

'Then, gentlemen,' retorted the Doctor, white with passion, 'the sooner you follow the example of your friend Mr. Kneeshaw and quit the service of the church the better. Such a presentation is an insult to the church, an insult to religion, and an insult to myself' —a really fine climax—' and I shall not permit it to be made by *my* teachers, or in *my* schools. Good evening, gentlemen.'

During this outburst, Mr. Lightowlers stood fronting the Doctor with the precise expression in his face of a ruminating cow looking through a gate at you with a mild, dull, puzzled curiosity, and he would probably have stood thus for half a minute more (for he found rest

after a heavy meal as promotive of mental as of physical digestion), if Mr. Garside had not pulled him by the coat-tails and piloted him out. The two walked half way down the road together without the interchange of a word. Mr. Garside was in deep trouble, too deep for words, as the Sunday School was a crown and kingdom to him.

Mr. Lightowlers was plunged in profound thought. After three minutes of such wrapped meditation he stopped suddenly to face Mr. Garside and electrify him with his discovery—‘*He’s agin it, too!*’ pointing with his thumb over his shoulder to the vicarage behind him.

‘Ay, he’s agin it,’ replied Mr. Garside, not in the least amazed by the information. ‘He’s gi’en us the sack reet—taichers an’ all. He has for sure.’

Mr. Garside then relapsed into despondent silence, while Mr. Lightowlers incubated, also in silence, on this new idea suggested by his colleague, which, as being expressed in the vernacular, was soon developed in his brain. It was in full possession there, even before he found himself again on the platform, face to face with the anxious and breathless meeting.

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ he began slowly, and with extreme impressiveness, ‘he’s gi’en us the sack.’

After the delivery of this Spartan despatch there was dead silence—not the silence of expectation, for it was rather a long speech for Mr. Lightowlers, and no one dreamed of his saying more—but the sultry silence before a thunderstorm. Then it burst in a tumult of angry exclamations and questions. Mr. Garside, as being the Mercury of their two leaders, was beset by a host of eager and enraged teachers demanding the particulars of the interview. He gave always and to all the same stereotyped answer: ‘He said we mun gie up schooil or presentation—one or t’other.’ We need hardly say that the excited meeting decided unanimously to give up the school. The West Riding people never tire of telling you that they may be led but not driven, and certainly Dr. Clancy’s attempt to stop the movement was about as effective as an attempt to turn back a pig by tugging at its tail.

When this phase of the movement became thoroughly known through the medium of the mills, the Independents generously came for-

ward with an offer of their school for the tea-party and presentation. They thought it a good opportunity to display Christian charity and to stir up deadly strife among the church party. While the teachers hesitated between this offer and a proposition made by the leader of a fife and drum band to head a procession of the subscribers through Wefton to Mr. Kneeshaw's lodgings, where the presentation might be made in the open air, the whole movement collapsed suddenly at a pin-prick.

George heard of the business for the first time from his tailor, an Independent, who, though he knew it was to be kept a profound secret, could not resist the temptation of parading the magnanimity of his sect. George was at once surprised, pleased, and disgusted. He thought he had made no way among a people who took a kindness as if they were doing it, and whose most cordial manner seemed just to stop short of heaving half a brick at you. He was therefore very much surprised and pleased by the feeling that underlay the movement, but the movement humiliated him, as praise undeserved humiliates one, and its consequences and accompaniments disgusted him.

He rushed off at once to see the junior superintendent, as there was not time enough to get an idea into Mr. Lightowlers' head, and begged Mr. Garside to summon the subscribers as soon as possible to a meeting in the school. Mr. Garside was disappointed to find him informed of the movement, but at the same time was pleased with the hope of his advice at this crisis. He had not the least doubt that Mr. Kneeshaw meant at the meeting to give advice about the place, time, manner, and perhaps even form of the presentation to be made to him, nor would such advice have struck him as out of taste or odd. He promised to have a full meeting of the subscribers at the school on the following evening—and he had. The place was crowded to suffocation, and George met with an overwhelming reception. It seemed as though feelings which had been rigidly suppressed for nearly two years had reached bursting pressure and exploded in a moment. George was overpowered, and was glad of the five minutes' respite to recover himself which Mr. Lightowlers' introductory speech gave him. Mr. Lightowlers rose, waited till there was perfect silence and for

half a minute after, and then addressed the meeting thus:—‘Ladies and gentlemen,—pause—‘aw’ve nowt that’s owt to say,—long pause—‘aw’ve been nine year superintendent of this ere schooil, and aw’ve allus done my best, allus, aw hev.’ Here Mr. Lightowlers resumed his seat slowly and deliberately, and looked round upon the meeting with an air of self-complacency. Mr. Garside, however, after two minutes’ whispering, got it into his colleague’s head that Mr. Kneeshaw, and not himself, should have been the subject of his address, whereupon Mr. Lightowlers again rose without haste and without hesitation, and recommenced: ‘Ladies and gentlemen, Muster Kneeshaw is baan to spak’ an’ odd word to t’ subscribers. Aw’m a subscriber mysen; an’ aw’m nowt agin’ gien’ five shillin’ more towards t’ presentation.’

At this the applause was deafening, and Mr. Lightowlers resumed his seat with the pleased and proud expression in his face of a patriot who had done and suffered great things for a not ungrateful country. Indeed the meeting was so moved by the grace and generosity of this reference to the presentation, that

a verse of the song ‘The Fine Old English Gentleman,’ struck up by Mr. Binns, of the parish church choir, was sung by the whole audience enthusiastically in compliment to Mr. Lightowlers. It might have been thought that the enthusiasm had now reached its climax. Far from it. When George rose to speak, the audience dwarfed all preceding demonstrations by standing, cheering, clapping hands, and stamping feet for the space of two minutes. Of course much of the feeling displayed was an answer to Dr. Clancy’s insulting ultimatum, but, taking all discount off, an immense amount remained to the credit of George. He had prepared a really good speech, but did not deliver a single word of it, not merely because it was an inadequate answer to this confounding demonstration, but because it all vanished like a dream when he stood face to face with the surging, cheering crowd. He stammered out some words of surprise and thankfulness, more eloquent infinitely than any prepared speech. He spoke then sincerely of the little he had done, and of the half-hearted way in which he had done it, and came thus to the point of his speech, which was that this little

would be undone if he left nothing but strife behind him ; that the subscribers would add even to the extreme kindness they had already shown him by accepting a suggestion he ventured to make as to the form of the presentation—great applause here—and that this suggestion was that the subscriptions should go to purchase books for a Sunday School library. This suggestion was accepted after much demur and remonstrance ; Dr. Clancy was conciliated, peace restored, George immensely relieved, and Mr. Garside re-established on his throne.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WOMEN OF THE FUTURE.

We rather hurried and huddled together the close of the last chapter. We ought to have said something of the disappointment of the subscribers at George's renunciation of all personal advantage from their generosity, and of the proportionate wrath of the village Hampdens amongst them against Dr. Clancy and Mr. Gant, to whose spiteful interference they put it down. George, to do him only bare justice, did all he could to convince them that in no case could he have accepted the purse or its value with a clear conscience, but they wouldn't be convinced. Mr. Gant, never popular, was now odious, as the jealous instigator of the Doctor in the business. On the other hand, George's magnanimity increased his popularity tenfold, and as this main channel for its expression was blocked, it over-

flowed into a hundred rills and rivulets of private presents of all kinds, from a valuable timepiece down to such a spacious pincushion as would have gladdened the soul of Mrs. Gamp. Nor did he escape a presentation after all. There was in the day-school a young lady named Rachael Ann Hodgson, of the mature age of ten years, a very pretty and precocious child, who took it into her head to set on foot a subscription among the school children for a present to Mr. Kneeshaw. George took great interest in the day-schools, and had a class, of which Miss Hodgson was a pet member, and the news of his leaving them was taken very much to heart by them all. Miss Hodgson eat nothing on the day she heard it, and did not sleep the following night, and would probably have made herself ill by fretting if the bright idea of the presentation had not occurred to her. She mentioned it to the mistress, who privately approved very strongly of it, and even expressed her strong approval to the child ; but, with the fear of Dr. Clancy before her eyes, she did not dare do more than encourage Rachael Ann to take the whole business in hand herself. Hereupon Rachael

Ann had recourse for advice to her father, a busy member of a local Liberal committee. Mr. Hodgson, as a father, as a Liberal, as a committee man, was immensely pleased with Rachael Ann's idea. He advised her at once to form a committee, to elect a secretary and treasurer, and to assign a district to each member of the committee, to canvass for subscriptions. He also minutely instructed her as to the mode of procedure at their meetings, of which she, of course, was to be chairwoman.

Rachael Ann, a busy, important, clever, and original young woman, took the thing very seriously and sedately. Having appointed the whole class as a committee, she called a meeting of it for the assignment of a district to each of its members, and for the election of a treasurer and secretary, to be held in her house that evening. She chose her home instead of the class-room for the place of meeting, as she wished to have her father at hand to consult as legal adviser. He was not, however, to be admitted into the board-room, as his presence might overshadow the majesty of the chair.

Of course, an hour before the time appointed for the meeting, every child on the committee,

was present in her place. And, if the truth must be told, the chairwoman herself was in her place more than two hours before the appointed time. She had cut out slips of paper, two for each member of the committee, to write the name of the secretary and treasurer she wished to vote for, and she had written the name of each in collecting books provided by her father, notwithstanding that she was told again and again by her legal adviser that this was the future secretary's work. However, she couldn't resist the temptation, as anyone who remembers his childhood may imagine.

'Polly and Sarah Jane, give up,' cried the chairwoman, with a peremptory nod. Polly and Sarah Jane were making cats-cradles. 'We're first to elect a secretary. You've all to write the name of the person you vote for on one of the slips of paper, then fold it up and put it into the mug.' The mug was Rachael Ann's very own, a gorgeous vessel, with 'A Present from Blackpool for a Good Child,' inscribed in large gold letters upon it. As there was but one pen, and each child wrote with her head on her left arm, her tongue out, and her eye following the slow trail of the pen as intently

as a sportsman his game, the election took some time. As the other girls were not allowed to look over the voter's shoulder, they *had* to be allowed to play 'hunt the slipper,' which they did, all except the voter and the chairwoman, whose dignity, after a desperate struggle with her baser passions, conquered and kept her in the chair. When the voting papers were all at last written, folded, and dropped into the mug, it was found that this elaborate imitation of the ballot was not as effective as might be wished. For, in the first place, every child knew every other child's handwriting; and, in the second place, every child, except the chairwoman, artfully voted for herself. As, however, the chairwoman had voted for Elizabeth Tennant, this young woman headed the poll by a majority of one. Whereupon she rushed at the chairwoman, and scandalised her by flinging her arms round her neck, kissing her effusively, and then dancing round the room.

'Lizzie!' cried the chairwoman, in a shocked voice.

'What?'

'Sit down.'

'But what am I to do?' asked the secre-

tary, sobered suddenly by the sense of responsibility.

Hereupon the chairwoman flushed red as fire. What *was* there to do? Hadn't she herself done already all the secretary's work? After fidgeting uneasily in the chair for a moment, she slipped off it without a word, marched to the door, whose handle she succeeded in turning with both hands, and disappeared to consult her legal adviser.

'I told you how it would be, Rachael Ann,' said Mr. Hodgson, shaking his head sadly and solemnly.

'I couldn't help it, father,' pleaded Rachael Ann penitently.

'Did you write the date?'

'No, I didn't,' eagerly.

'She can write the date,' said the oracle, really proud of the suggestion.

Rachael Ann was back in the board-room in a moment. 'Lizzie, you're to write the day of the month in each of the books.'

'Is that all?'

'And the day of the week,' added the chairwoman, with some presence of mind.

Miss Tennant would have rushed at once at

her work if the chairwoman hadn't stopped her.

'We want the pen to elect a treasurer. You're all to write the name of the person you vote for—same as before,' she said authoritatively.

'What's the good?' snapped Miss Breaks; 'Lizzie voted for herself.'

'So did you,' retorted Lizzie.

As this was a ticklish topic it was pursued no further, but the feeling of the meeting was obviously and unanimously against the ballot.

'It's all nowt,' cried Miss Angles; while Miss Mathers declared she 'wouldn't play at it,' and Miss Terry horrified the chairwoman still more by the suggestion that they should play French blind man's buff—the chairwoman being blindfold, and whoever she touched first should be treasurer. Though this was the democratic principle of election carried out to a perfection almost ideal, the chairwoman was not advanced enough to approve of it, and things came to a deadlock. Recourse had to be had again to the legal adviser, who was more prompt this time with an opinion. As

his own committee were always got out of a rut of sullenness by an order of ‘glasses round,’ Mr. Hodgson at once suggested that the cake, meant to be distributed amongst the committee at the conclusion of their labours, should be administered forthwith. The chairwoman, not herself altogether disinterested, jumped at the suggestion actually and metaphorically, but resumed her official manner on her reappearance in the board-room, bearing the plate of cake with the solemnity of an acolyte. The appearance of the cake had the effect of the approach of a general election upon the members, converting waverers and convincing obstructives. Even the snappish Selina Breaks became a courtier, and suggested that the chairwoman should choose the treasurer; while Louisa Terry outdid and outbid her by proposing that the chairwoman herself should be treasurer, which was carried by acclamation. The chairwoman again retired to consult her legal adviser, who decided that as both Lord Beaconsfield and Mr. Gladstone had held other offices in conjunction with the premiership, Rachael Ann might accept the post of treasurer, which was accepted accordingly.

There remained only the assignment of districts to the canvassers, a delicate and difficult business ; for, as it was decided to go by standards, no one liked collecting among the first standard, the most in number and least in age. Miss Angles expressed the precise sentiment of the meeting in complaining that ‘ they would be nobbut twenty-four to a shilling,’ a terse and Yorkshire way of calculating the subscriptions at a halfpenny apiece. *Noblesse oblige* ; the chairwoman generously volunteered to take half the first standard herself, and her example so influenced the committee that the other half and the other standards were undertaken at once. Then the committee paid an unofficial visit to the chairwoman’s doll, which was upstairs in a gorgeous cradle (won in a bazaar raffle), and each of the members was allowed to make it squeak by squeezing its stomach, and sleep by laying it on its back. Parliament was then prorogued till the following Monday evening, when the subscriptions were to be brought in to the treasurer ; and the members—each made happy by the present of a bit of toffee—dispersed for the recess.

We have given the proceedings of the

committee at length because, owing to Mr. Gant's excess of zeal, they had results out of proportion to their importance. On the following Monday the committee reassembled two hours almost before the assigned time. Its members were in a state of intense and intolerable impatience. Each bore an immense blue envelope sealed with an immense red seal, addressed duly, but with this additional inscription underlined: '*To be opened only by the Chairwoman in committee.*' It had been left that afternoon at each of their houses by a lady in a grand carriage. The chairwoman at once took the chair, and with trembling hands, and in a silence that might be felt, broke the seal of her own envelope first. It was a crushing disappointment; there was only a blank piece of paper in it. She must cry, but could not cry in committee; so she rushed to the door, and in another minute was sobbing on her father's knee. Her father took the envelope, looked at the enclosure, put the child down, and cheered! It was a ten-pound Bank of England note.

‘It’s ten pounds, doy! ten golden sovereigns —two hundred shillings!’ exclaimed the

delighted Mr. Hodgson, waving the note round his head.

Rachael Ann stood for a moment looking up at the note with a face of flame, too much stunned by the reaction and by the discovery of this fabulous treasure to do more than gaze and gape. In another moment she leaped up at it, and cried breathlessly, 'Give it to me, father!' and rushed back with it into the board-room.

'It's ten pounds!' she exclaimed, rushing to show it to the secretary in the wildest excitement, utterly forgetful of her official dignity. 'Two hundred shillings, Lizzie!'

Lizzie's first impulse, and the first impulse of every other member of the committee, was, of course, to open her own envelope. But this was to be done only by the chairwoman, who tore open Lizzie's first, calling her father, at the same time, to come and interpret. Mr. Hodgson pronounced Lizzie's a five-pound note. A five-pound note was found also in every other envelope, and, as there were nine members of the committee besides the chairwoman, the sum total of the enclosures amounted to 55*l.*! The school subscrip-

tions came to 4*l.* 13*s.* 3*½d.*, making in all 59*l.* 13*s.* 3*½d.* The members of the committee danced, and screamed, and hugged each other, without any rebuke from their chairwoman, who herself, indeed, was jumping up and down, holding by each breast of her father's coat. When this ecstasy had somewhat subsided, the first question was, 'Who was the fairy godmother?' No one knew.

'She was an old lady with a red wig,' said Mr. Hodgson.

'It's nothing of the sort,' cried the sharp, clear, decided voice of Miss Tubbs, who entered at this moment. 'It isn't a wig, and it isn't red.'

It was not. Her hair was of the reddish-brown hue which is a favourite colour for old ladies' wigs; hence Mr. Hodgson's mistake. Miss Tubbs was in such high good humour with herself for her own kindness that she forgave it.

'What! opened them already! I wanted to have the pleasure of seeing you open them. I didn't think the committee met till half-past five, Mr. Chairman. This is the chairman, isn't it?' patting Rachael Ann on the cheek.

‘I beg your pardon, ma’am,’ stammered Mr. Hodgson at last. ‘I didn’t see you near to-day, ma’am, I’m sure. Yes, ma’am, that’s my daughter, Rachael Ann. Rachael Ann, thank the lady.’

‘No ; she mustn’t thank me. I’m only one of the subscribers. I heard the children were getting up a present to Mr. Kneeshaw among themselves, and I went to offer a subscription to the mistress, when she told me of the committee, and the chairman, and the secretary. Which is the secretary? This? I thought so! And I was so pleased with the business that I went round amongst the rich Parish Church people, and a few of my own friends, and collected the money. I can assure you it was all given with the greatest goodwill, both for Mr. Kneeshaw’s sake and for the sake of the chairman and her committee. Well, Mr. Chairman, were you pleased? And what are you going to buy, eh?’

Rachael Ann stood speechless, looking up at Miss Tubbs with exceeding reverence; the other children also, frozen where they stood, and in the positions in which they were surprised, gazed with wide-eyed awe at the fairy godmother.

‘Rachael Ann, do you hear?’ exclaimed Mr. Hodgson, in an accent of reproach. ‘You should have been here a minute ago, ma’am, and seen them! They were fit to tear the house down for joy.’

‘I heard them. They made such a racket, that I got in without your hearing me. But what are you going to buy, Mr. Chairman?’

‘Please, ma’am,’ said Rachael Ann timidly, with a very becoming curtsey, ‘will you tell us, please?’

‘What do you think of a watch?’

A watch! The whole committee looked blank with the same thought. Sixty pounds for a tiny watch! The Town Hall clock would have seemed a little thing for 60*l.* Miss Tubbs perceived the look and its meaning; she knew how children and Americans judged everything by size.

‘Or you might give him the money. You might change it all into shillings and give it to him in a big bag.’ At this suggestion the countenance of the committee brightened again. ‘Or suppose you bought him a watch and chain, and a dressing-case, and a writing-desk,

and a gold pencil-case, and a photographic album with the photographs of the committee in it. It would nearly take a cab to carry them all.'

'Eh ! that would be grand !' Miss Tennant involuntarily exclaimed, and it was evident she expressed the feeling of the committee. That their own photographs should form part of the presentation was an irresistible *argumentum ad feminam*. Thus Miss Tubbs, as usual, got her way, and smuggled the watch in under a heap of other things. In everything, great or little, with which she meddled, she must have her own way.

'Well, children, will that do ?'

There was a universal shout, 'Yes, ma'am.'

'And when would you like to buy them ?'

'Oh, ma'am, please !' pleaded Rachael Ann, with clasped hands and an expression of life and death earnestness, 'Could we get them to-night ?'

'To-night ! my dear child. It's past five o'clock.' But seeing the look of disappointment on every little face, and understanding that, in such a case especially, 'A day to childhood seems a year,' and not forgetting either

that it would be to her own convenience to get the thing done with in one journey—for, of course, she must herself choose the articles under the pretence of allowing a free choice to the children—she said, ‘If you wish it very much, we must try and manage it, Mr. Chairman. Let me see: how many are there of you? Ten. Mr. Hodgson, will you kindly call a cab, and take five of the children with you in it to Banks’, the jeweller’s, and I shall take the other five there in the carriage. Go, get your bonnet on, Mr. Chairman. I shall take you, and the secretary, and these three,’ picking out the shabbiest-looking of the girls—not, to tell the truth, because it was the kindest, but because it was the oddest thing to do. She rejoiced in the thought of being seen driving about Wefton with a carriage full of shabby-looking little girls. As for the chosen children, they were in the seventh heaven of delight at the prospect of riding in a grand carriage, with a grand lady, to a grand jeweller’s shop, to buy there 60*l.* worth of things! They thought 60*l.* should buy the whole shop, grand as it was. And, indeed, this was Miss Tubbs’ difficulty: to persuade

the children that they had got full value for their money in a few articles that one of them could carry out of the shop. But she did at last so persuade them, and truly too ; for she haggled with the jeweller, and beat down his prices, in a way that would have extorted the admiration of a Jew. The only regret left in the minds of the children as they quitted the shop was that the articles had to remain at the jeweller's to have suitable inscriptions engraved upon them, and to be displayed for three days in his window ; but even this last lingering regret was dispelled by Miss Tubbs asking the committee to tea, on the evening of the fourth day, to meet Mr. Kneeshaw and make the presentation.

And on the fourth day, at evening, they did accordingly meet Mr. Kneeshaw at Miss Tubbs' house. Rachael Ann, after tea, advanced to make a very pompous and hollow speech, composed for her by her father ; but fortunately forgot it all in her nervousness.

‘ Please, Mr. Kneeshaw ’—long pause, during which the bright brown eyes, looking up wistfully at George, filled slowly with tears —‘ please, Mr. Kneeshaw, these are for you,’

and the little woman broke down and cried with nervousness and mortification.

George, in the most natural and fatherly way in the world, took her on his knee and kissed her (to the horror of old Mrs. Ashton, a Parish Churchite, but to the delight and admiration of Miss Tubbs), and told her how pleased and touched he was, and how he would always remember her, and sometimes write to her, and send messages to his class ; and so soothed her that she soon forgot her breakdown, and was bright and happy again. Indeed, George was only too glad to hide his own emotion in soothing hers. He therefore spoke no speech ; but took occasion during the evening to say a word or two of simple, earnest acknowledgment to each of the subscribers present, children and adults, which came from his heart and went to theirs more directly than any set speech could have done.

George, as we have said, owed the large share in the business taken by Miss Tubbs to the kind offices of Mr. Gant. That gentleman, being in the habit of unbosoming himself pretty freely to Miss Tubbs, had again and again detailed George's iniquities to her, and the

iniquities of his partisans. He boasted, too, of having brought to nought the Sunday School presentation, and complained bitterly of Dr. Clancy's declining to interfere with that set on foot by the little children of the Day School. Now Miss Tubbs' Christianity did not go very deep, and she was, therefore, not in the least scandalised by Mr. Kneeshaw's giving up everything for conscience sake. On the contrary, Mr. Gant's zeal against him, which she took for jealousy, disgusted her. This, however, alone, would not have stirred her to active opposition. But Mr. Gant had the audacity to resent a stinging sarcasm of hers by the retort that all who sided with Mr. Kneeshaw must be infidels at heart. Hence Miss Tubbs' call on the school-mistress to offer a subscription. On hearing from her, however, of the committee, chairwoman, &c., she was so pleased (being a Women's Rights zealot herself) that she went round among her own friends and the richer Parish Church people, roused them by a recital of what she called Mr. Kneeshaw's wrongs and merits, amused them by the story of the committee, and extracted, without the least difficulty, the sum of which she disposed to such advantage.

CHAPTER XXV.

MABEL'S ANODYNE.

FOUR days after the children's presentation George sailed from Liverpool. The Committee, in fact, had only just time to have their photographs taken and presented to him in the station, five minutes before the starting of the train. Beside the children and Archer Lawley, who was to accompany him to Liverpool, a crowd of his well-wishers had come to bid him good-bye. An immense depth and warmth of heart lie hid beneath the chilling surface of these West Riding folk, which only a rare and great occasion discloses; and George was surprised to see in the crowd many a man and woman who had seemed barely to tolerate his visits, and who had seemed to accept any kindness he had done them ungraciously, and almost offensively. In some cases the general feeling expressed itself in tangible and em-

barrassing shapes. One old lady, for instance, thrust into the carriage to him kindly, but of course ostentatiously, a vast pasty. 'Tak' it,' she said ; 'it's gooid. There's aboon four aance of butter in it.' While another, her near neighbour, not to be outdone, had wrapped up a sparerib of pork in a red pocket handkerchief, which she forced on George, probably as a provision in case of shipwreck. 'It's hooam fed,' she said ; 'there's little like it where th'art baan, thou knows.' Mr. Lightowlers too was there, in the midst of a group of millgirls, teachers—mostly in tears—who had sacrificed half a day's wage to this farewell. Mr. Lightowlers had now got abreast of the speech he should have made at the meeting. Short as it was, it had cost him much time and thought, and would, no doubt, have done him and the school he represented credit, if he had got it out, as he meant to do, at the station. But he didn't. He had nearly begun it, however, when the train started, and George swept past the platform (on which Mr. Lightowlers stood, hemming to clear his throat) amid cheers, tears, and waving of wet handkerchiefs.

'What a kindly people, Lawley !' exclaimed

George, very much affected, turning from the window, when a curve at last hid the crowd on the platform from his sight.

‘They’re the kindest people in the world,’ replied Lawley, ‘and they know it.’

It was a great demonstration of feeling in favour of a man who had not been two years amongst them, but the crowd was brought together not only by a sense of George’s merits, but by a sense of his wrongs. Why should they have to take this public farewell of him at a railway station? Because Dr. Clancy, at Mr. Gant’s instigation, had forbidden any meeting for the purpose in the schools. And besides this sense of George’s kindness, and this sense of injustice done him, there was also the sense of a parting like that of death—for a voyage to Australia is almost as dim and dreadful in the imagination of the inland poor as the voyage to the other world. All these feelings brought such a crowd to the station that strangers were under the impression some prince or murderer must be in the train.

‘It’s nobbut a parson,’ answered a railway porter in reply to one such curious inquirer.

‘But what’s he done?’

‘Nowt.’

With this explanation the anxious inquirer had perforce to be content, for his informant was a Lancashire and Yorkshire railway porter, and extraordinarily courteous and communicative for one of that company’s officials.

Quitting George himself, we shall follow his thoughts back to the Grange, to ‘the nursery,’ to Mabel, utterly miserable for the moment, seated at the table, with her head resting on it, buried between her clasped hands. She had kept up all through with wonderful courage and cheerfulness, until, just at the last moment, some remark made by George (in setting a watch he had given her) about the difference between English and Australian time, brought suddenly the distance which was to separate them vividly before her. All her spirit in a moment slipped away from her like water, and left her sobbing and clinging to George like a little child, as he folded her in a last embrace. It was not like Mabel, but for the last few weeks she had been on the strain to keep cheerful, hopeful, and happy in George’s company, and the reaction came upon her just a minute too soon. In another minute

he was gone. She heard him hurry down the stairs, heard the hall-door open and shut, heard the cab drive off, in a kind of stupor, as in a dim dream ; and still the same sounds followed each other in the same order, over and over and over again in her mind—his step on the stairs, the opening and shutting of the door, and the rattle of the cab on the pavement. She could no more get them out of her head than we can get a haunting tune out of our head ; and behind them was a great trouble, which she knew was there, but shrank from facing. Out of this stupor she at last roused herself. Her spirit rallied and reasserted itself, and forced her into doing what certainly no other girl in Wefton would think of doing in the same circumstances—sick-visiting.

There are a great many receipts for the cure of melancholy. There is that in *The Spleen* :—‘Fling but a stone, the giant dies !’ There is old Burton’s :—‘Be not solitary ; be not idle.’ There is Johnson’s improvement upon it :—‘If you are idle, be not solitary ; if you are solitary, be not idle.’ But the best receipt in the world we believe to be this—Find some one more wretched than yourself,

and get out of yourself in trying to relieve him. It includes Green's, Burton's, Johnson's receipt of occupation and company; but it prescribes an occupation that will take you out of yourself most, and a company that puts to shame your discontent. Anyhow, Mabel had found it of old the most effective remedy for depression, and now, by a great effort, she forced herself to a recourse to it. She chose the worst case on her list, that of the sick child of a poor woman, who was expiating by starvation the crime of being kicked almost to death by her drunken husband. He had been sent to prison for a month for the assault—just in the nick of time for him; for, as he had pawned all he could lay hands on for drink, till there was not another drop to be had, and nothing left, therefore, to live for, he was perfectly content to be taken care of by the Queen. Meantime his wife was left to console herself with such sweet memories of him as remained to her—five tender pledges of his love, the youngest five weeks old, and the tickets of eight other pledges in the generous charge of an uncle. It is said that the children of the very poor die in heaps, and that the mortality amongst them

is out of all proportion greater than that amongst those of the more comfortable classes, and this, no doubt, is something to be thankful for. Of them, at least, it is true:—

Μὴ φῦναι τὸν ἀπαντα νικᾶ λόγον
Τὸ δ', ἐπεὶ φανῆ
Βῆναι κεῖθεν ὅθενπερ ἥκει
Πολὺ δεύτερον ὡς τάχιστα.

We give this pessimist sentiment as we find it in the Greek chorus, in order not to shock the sensibilities of the sex, who are optimists to a man. But though, as we say, vast numbers of the children of the poor die, it is amazing how much it takes, in many cases, to kill them. Certainly it cost Death as much trouble to kill a brace of Mrs. Houldsworth's children as it would have taken him to empty a palace. He had fair game to begin with in children born of a drunken father and an ill-used and half-starved mother, while from their birth they were themselves half-starved and ill-used, and so clothed that it would have been almost better to have let them go naked. At least, then, the rain would have run off, and not lodged in their broken boots and tattered shirts. Then Death served out to them in quick succession

almost every childish disease in his dispensary, and followed up this volley with the bayonet, in the shape of Dr. Dredge's lancet and leeches, in vain. He then ran over the eldest boy with a hansom, who, however, emerged almost as unhurt as a hen from under the vehicle, while the youngest but one drank from the spout of a boiling kettle without being much worse than his father from his fiery potations. But at last the health of the eldest boy gave way, after three years' siege, during which it was almost continually mined within by starvation and assaulted without by disease and cold. He broke down suddenly and died in three days, to the inexpressible grief of his mother, who complained piteously to Mabel, that in five weeks more he would have been a half-timer, and brought her in three shillings a week. He was buried in a parish coffin and in a pauper's grave, a week after his father was committed to jail ; and the funeral *cortège* consisted of his mother (with a borrowed veil hiding her two still black eyes), a warm-hearted old Irish washerwoman, his two brothers, and his little sister Minnie. The day was wet and bitter, the cemetery exposed, and that corner of it in

which paupers were flung together was ankle-deep in water, and Minnie's boots seemed made of rather stout blotting-paper. Her brother John George, in a black box, being lowered roughly into a filthy hole, and scolded to the last by a man in a white nightshirt, was Minnie's idea of the ceremony. She was at no loss either to account for this frightful punishment which had overtaken her brother. For the day before he died he *would* get out of bed (the child was wandering), in spite of his mother's threat 'to put him in the black man's cellar if he stirred.' This then was the black man's cellar into which he was now being put. It was a horrible punishment, and had its due effect on Minnie when her turn came, which it did the next day. For the cold, which seemed to turn to ice the very marrow in her bones, settled deep on her lungs, and she took her brother's place in bed. Be sure she was docility itself with 'the black man's cellar' always before her eyes, and was afraid to disturb her mother at night by asking for a drink, though she was parched with thirst.

This was the patient little patient Mabel set forth to see. Certainly we have taken an

unconscionable time in introducing her, but Minnie was once a pet of ours, and pets are always bores to strangers. She'll not trouble the reader much longer, however, or anyone else either. Mabel, having put up, with her usual stores for the replenishment of Mrs. Houldsworth's empty larder, a most gorgeous doll, set forth to find, in helping this hopeless household, the anodyne she sought. Mrs. Houldsworth's was a horrid little hole of a house—a single room, of such narrow dimensions that, if it was not for the consideration of Mr. Houldsworth in taking out of it every stick of portable furniture, Mabel would hardly have found room to move without tumbling a chair over, or over a child. Almost the only furniture in the place, in fact, was a bed, and a settle made up as a bed at the far side of the fire. Minnie was lying still as death on the settle, and took no more notice of Mabel than she had taken all the morning of her mother, or of her two brothers, who were having rather a noisy game of funeral, digging a hole in a little heap of coals (kept inside the door for safety and for a seat), and trying to force a half-starved cat to lie in it till they covered her well up. Their

draggled and dogged-looking mother, who had a baby of about six weeks old at her breast, would now and then object in really tremendous language, not to the game itself, but to the noise they made in playing at it. They didn't mind her in the least, but at Mabel's entry they lost their presence of mind, and thereby the cat, which escaped out of doors, while their mother, at sight of the basket, rose and looked as amiable as she could, which wasn't much.

‘ How's Minnie, Mrs. Houldsworth ? ’

‘ Shoo's a deal waur, Miss. I can mak' nowt on her to-day. She taks no notice of nobody.’

Mabel stepped across to the settle and smoothed aside the hair from the fixed eyes which had a far-off and fearful expression in them. She was looking into ‘ the black man's cellar ’ with a presentiment that she would be thrust there soon herself by her mother.

‘ Don't you know me, Minnie ? ’

No ; Minnie didn't know her. Mabel then produced the dazzling doll. She had promised it yesterday morning, and the child looked and longed for it with the double impatience of

childhood and illness all that day and all the night through, and still this morning she kept worrying her mother about it with fretful persistence, till that good lady, pouncing upon her savagely, brought at once before the child's eyes, by her shrill scolding, the horrible hole into which her brother had been shut up for his naughtiness. That picture of the funeral, changing from moment to moment, like a kaleidoscope, into different phases, all of them frightful, cowed and fascinated her, and fixed her eyes for hours with the expression which seemed to look through Mabel at some grisly spectre in the distance. But the doll, gorgeous as a sunset, caught and recalled her notice. She clutched it greedily, and hugged it and held it from her to look at, and hugged it to her again with extraordinary energy and interest, her weakness being considered. Then she looked up from it to Mabel, at first with the puzzled expression of one who is trying to make out the meaning of a sentence in a strange tongue—for kindness was Greek to her—and then with a wan, faint, and flickering smile, as if she had mastered the meaning and found it very good.

‘ Do you like the doll, Minnie? ’

Minnie’s reply was more eloquent than words. She again held the doll from her for a moment to admire, and expressed her admiration by hugging it again to her heart.

‘ You must give it something to eat, and show it how to eat, Minnie.’ For Minnie had refused all food, even beef-tea, for three days, and Mabel was trying by this stratagem to coax her into having some jelly she had brought. It was no use. Minnie tried, but couldn’t swallow, and held out the doll to Mabel to be fed in her place. Just then the two boys, whom the sight of the jelly attracted, pressed so importunately against Mabel that their mother cuffed one and scolded both so shrilly that Minnie’s terror returned upon her. She clutched Mabel’s hand, just as it was taking the doll from her, and clung to it while the old fixed and fearful and far-off expression came back into her eyes. Mabel saw in a moment that Minnie was in mortal terror of her mother, and saw also no less clearly that the child had not long to live. It was horrible to think she should die shrinking from the only hand there was to minister to her.

‘Mrs. Houldsworth, I shall nurse Minnie for a few hours, if you will kindly call at the Grange, and say that I shall not be home for some time. I dare say you have marketing to do, and will be glad to get free. You need not hurry back, as I shall stay at least three hours.’ Mabel reinforced her marketing suggestion by putting a few shillings into Mrs. Houldsworth’s hand, and got rid of both boys at the same time by giving them threepence each to spend with their mother in the market.

Having Minnie to herself—we need hardly say that ‘Minnie’ was Mabel’s name for the child, not that current in the Houldsworth household, where she was known as ‘Wilhelmina’—having Minnie to herself, Mabel recalled her attention by pretending to force the doll from her grasp, and then, being an adept in dealing with children, got out of Minnie piecemeal, by coaxing and skilful questions, the cause of her terror. She found it no use to tell the child that her brother had never been in the black box at all, since her mother, according to the invariable custom of the poor, had held her up and shown her his ghastly face as he lay in his coffin the moment before it was

closed. So Mabel had to try another tack, and tell her that God had taken her brother out of the black box and out of the filthy hole, and brought him to a beautiful palace, in the midst of a lovely garden. This didn't mend matters much. Minnie had heard the name of God daily from her father, and often from her mother, but always coupled as inseparably with the name of hell, and with the ideas hell suggests, as it is in some Christian creeds. Mabel therefore had to avoid this discredited name altogether, and to speak of a very kind person taking care of her brother.

‘Kind as oo?’ asked Minnie, looking anxiously up at Mabel.

‘Oh, ever, ever, ever so much kinder.’

This was too much for Minnie's imagination. She lay still for a moment, looking at the doll and trying to grasp this overpowering idea, till she had to give up the attempt in despair.

‘Will *oo* tak' me aat of black box?’

From which question it was plain both that Minnie had made her mind up that she was to be put into the black box, and also that she preferred to trust to mercies she knew to take

her out. Hereupon Mabel, like a modern theologian, had again to modify her system to suit the new situation. To make herself at once intelligible and credible to Minnie, she seemed to represent her brother as sent by post to heaven; as put into his coffin as into an envelope, which, having been posted in the grave, was broken open on its arrival in heaven, where he was released. She had now to return to a less materialistic view.

‘They won’t put *you* into the black box, Minnie; angels will take you up in their arms to heaven.’

The imagination even of a child in the West Riding is torpid. Minnie made a feeble attempt to follow Mabel’s pictures of angels and of heaven, but fell back tired, and contented with the assurance that she was not to be put into the black box. Her faith in this assurance was absolute, and it took a dead weight of horror off her heart; at the same time it was bound up with Mabel’s presence. Thus comforted, Minnie, for the first time since she was taken ill, fell into a sound sleep, with Mabel’s forefinger clutched in her little hand. An hour

later her mother's shrill voice roused her, and conjured up a frightful nightmare, which seemed to take four days in unfolding its funereal horrors, though it really lasted only the few twilight seconds between a sound sleep and thorough wakefulness. She started up with a truly heart-aching scream : ' I'll be goooid—I'll be goo—id ! ' This last word being prolonged into such a cry of agony as haunted Mabel for many a day. Minnie, in her dream, had got to that climax of horror in her own funeral, when the coffin having been screwed down upon her, and borne to the cemetery, and lowered into the foul and slimy grave, the mourners turn to leave it for ever, as the impatient sexton flings upon it the first shovelful of mud. The perspiration stood in beads on Minnie's forehead, her eyes were starting from her head, and her cheeks were drawn with such an expression of horror as made her look old and weird and withered. ' Minnie ! ' cried Mabel, almost in a scream, startled out of herself, and seeking to rouse the child instantaneously. At the sound of Mabel's voice, as by an exorcism, the horrible possession gave place, and a smile of the most perfect relief and love

and trust dawned in the child's face as she recognised Mabel bending anxiously over her. Let us hope life is such a dream, with such an awakening.

This paroxysm seemed to exhaust Minnie's remaining strength. She lay back, quite still, with closed eyes, and breathing that grew more and more quick and laboured till, as the rattle began in her throat, and the old terror was returning into her face (for she vividly remembered the rattle in her brother's throat, and what followed), she opened her eyes, and, stretching her arms to Mabel, cried in a terrified voice, '*Do tak' me in oor arms!*' Mabel took up the dying child with exceeding tenderness, and was again rewarded with a smile of such peace and trust as she has never forgotten. Minnie, with her head nestled against Mabel's bosom, kept her eyes fixed on her face with the look a dying Catholic fastens on his crucifix. She tried twice to say something, but Mabel could not catch the whisper. It was, no doubt, something loving, for Minnie, after the second attempt to speak, made an effort to raise her arm to Mabel's neck; but it fell back, and she could only pout her lips as

for a kiss, when the last long breath came and went, and life with it.

‘She’s—she’s gone!’ cried Mabel, awed and moved profoundly.

‘Ay, shoo’s goan,’ said the mother, looking critically into the still face which had fallen back over Mabel’s arm. ‘Shoo’s aat of it all ; shoo is.’

Without another word she took the body from Mabel, and laid it gently down on the settle, while a single tear found its way down a deep furrow in her cheek and dropped on the child’s dead face. She had been a loving little child herself once, but misery had scorched up her heart into a desert. Going to the door, she screamed out to James Henry, who was pegging a top bought out of Mabel’s threepence, and bid him ‘tell Mary Morony that our Wilhelmina is deead, and ax her if shoo’l coome and help to lig her aat.’ Meantime Mabel stood by the settle thinking, not without tears, what a sad little life it was, and wondering reverently what was its meaning :—

Riddle of destiny, who can show
What thy short visit meant, or know
What thy errand here below ?

She was not left long to such musing, for the neighbours, hearing of a death—a death is one of the few treats in their dull lives—crowded in, and disgusted Mabel with their cool criticisms on the corpse. ‘Mrs. Houldsworth,’ she said aside to that good lady, giving her some more money out of her slender purse, ‘don’t let the coffin be black. I shall bring some flowers to-morrow.’ Next day she brought the flowers, and on the fourth day she was in the cemetery chapel before the funeral arrived, and was the last to leave the little grave.

By this sad diversion Mabel softened the first sorrow of separation. It is a good receipt, if Misery attack you, to carry the war into her own camp and head-quarters, and we beg any despondent reader to try it :—

Si quid novisti rectius istis,
Candidus imperti ; si non, his utere mecum.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PENELOPE.

GEORGE's last words to Lawley as he left the ship was a reminder of his promise to see Mabel often, and report upon her persecutions or otherwise. He had, besides, told him twenty times over of Mabel's delight at the prospect of having such a friend to confide in and advise with, and of her extraordinary esteem for him.

These reports of Mabel's good opinion of him did not lose their effect on Archer Lawley, but their effect was the opposite to that intended by George. It made his friend shrink all the more from the guardianship imposed on him ; not, we need hardly say, that he thought Mabel likely to fall in love with him (he was the least of a coxcomb of any man in England), but that he thought himself likely to fall in love with Mabel. And we do not need *Much*

Ado About Nothing to teach us that nothing so disposes a man to love as the reported good opinion of a girl he admires. ‘Ce qui fait que les amants et les maîtresses ne s’ennuient point d’être ensemble, c’est qu’ils parlent toujours d’euxmêmes.’ Now this ever-delightful topic not only cements but creates love; nor was Mr. Archer Lawley more above this human weakness than most of us. Therefore the strong impression Mabel had made on him was by no means lessened by the report of the impression—such as it was—that he had made on her.

There was no help now for it, however. He must go see her, even if he has to go with his heart in his hand. Accordingly, half an hour after her return from Minnie’s funeral, Mr. Archer Lawley is announced. Mabel had got only three letters from George in four days, and was, therefore, impatient to hear of him from his friend. She rose to greet Mr. Lawley with extreme cordiality, though colouring a little with the consciousness of his mission.

‘How do you do, Mr. Lawley? I’m so glad to see you!’

Mr. Lawley made the usual response, and

an embarrassing silence ensued. He was nearly as shy as Mabel of introducing the subject of the link which brought them together. At last he mustered up courage to say: 'Mr. Kneeshaw commissioned me to bring you this, Miss Masters,' handing Mabel a small packet. He had prevented George posting it in order to have a text and a tangible excuse for his first visit. As Mabel took it, blushing 'celestial rosy red,' and murmured inarticulate thanks, Mr. Lawley's courage proportionately rose, and he proceeded to describe the perfection of the appointments of *The Southern Cross*, George's ship. Mabel listened with breathless interest, and, indeed, would have found something to interest her in a description of the railway carriage in which he travelled to Liverpool. Mr. Lawley having exhausted *The Southern Cross*, bethought him to describe the scene at the station at starting. This also to hear 'did Desdemona seriously incline,' though she had four pages of minute description of the scene near her heart and nearly by heart. Those great grey eyes looking up at him, wide with a childlike interest and absence of self-consciousness, made havoc the while in Lawley's heart,

and warned him to get out of range as quickly as possible. He started up rather abruptly, and held out his hand to take leave.

‘Are you going?’ in a tone of the most flattering disappointment. ‘I wanted to hear something of Squire.’

‘Oh, Squire is as well as he’ll ever be,’ said Lawley, resuming his seat with no great reluctance. ‘He’ll be a cripple for life. I wrote to ask Mr. Pickles to undertake his education and fit him to earn his bread as a clerk or something of that kind, and he has promised to do what he can for him.’

‘That’s very good of him.’

‘Yes; it’s near the election,’ said Lawley drily.

‘To secure Squire’s vote? Votes haven’t come as low as women and children yet, Mr. Lawley.’

She thought Lawley’s suggestion uncharitable, and was, besides, rallying his misogyny.

‘There are women of both sexes who think with the heart, and act on feelings as on principles, Miss Masters,’ said Lawley, who would stand to his guns even against Mabel; ‘and fifty pounds spent on Squire would have

more effect than five hundred arguments in making them Whig or Tory.'

'But who would hear of it?'

'Who wouldn't hear of it if he did *not* do something for the child? It would be in every opposition speech and placard.'

'It seems hard,' said Mabel, who had forgiven Mr. Pickles all his rudeness because of his discovery of George's transcendent worth—'it seems hard that because a man is a member of Parliament he should only get the credit of his faults.'

'It depends upon the member of Parliament. You see, Miss Masters, with some members their seats are due to their virtues; with others, their virtues are due to their seats. I'm afraid Mr. Pickles' are ex-officio virtues; at least no one ever heard of them till he became a candidate.'

Mabel was disappointed to find Mr. Lawley so cynical, and yet it somehow seemed to her that his cynicism was an essential part of his superiority. Her father was cynical, George was cynical; probably, therefore, extreme cleverness and cynicism went always together. All those who eat, as they did, of the tree of

knowledge found its fruit, she supposed, bitter and embittering.

‘I shall have to fall back upon the woman’s argument, Mr. Lawley, which is, you know, to say the same thing over again more positively! I think it very good of Mr. Pickles to provide for Squire,’—with a defiant nod.

Lawley would have been very much disappointed if he had brought Mabel over to his views. He thought trustfulness as becoming in a woman as in a child. In fact, his ideal of a perfect woman was a child’s heart and a man’s brain, and he fancied he found it in Mabel. How much this fancy was assisted by the loveliness of the face through which heart and brain expressed themselves we shall not say.

‘Squire thinks so too, Miss Masters. When I told him of Mr. Pickles’ promise it seemed to take a load off his mind. What do you think the load was?—The fear of being a burden to his mother. You see rich people’s children haven’t even themselves to think for, but even the little children of the poor are made to think for others—nurse the baby, or ‘twine’ the washing-machine, or ‘addle’ a penny a day by

carrying dinners. Squire's mother seems to have spared no pains to teach him that he had little business to come into the world at all, and none to stay here unless he could 'addle brass.' He told me one day in a burst of confidence that he had saved five shillings. For what?—For his funeral! I broke it to him as gently as I could that the doctor gave no hope of his funeral at all, and that he must prepare himself to live. He took the news very calmly, and simply said he thought then he would spend his five shillings in crutches. However, he changed his mind once more. He again took me into confidence, and told me of the children's presentation to Mr. Kneeshaw, of which he had heard, and to which he wished to devote his whole fortune; but what would his mother say? His mother, whom I sent for, cried a good deal and kissed him and said it should all go and more to it from their Sally; and, as for crutches, he should have crutches if they were all to pinch for it. Poor little chap! I think I never saw a child so happy as he was when his mother approved of his idea.'

Mabel was too much moved to speak for a

moment, then she exclaimed, 'I should so like to see him,' adding hurriedly, 'when he gets home again,' for she remembered Mr. Lawley's hesitation when Squire suggested her coming out to Fenton to see him. This time, however, Mr. Lawley, with an eagerness about which there was no mistake, hastened to say, 'Could you and your aunt come out to lunch on Wednesday next, Miss Masters? I cannot tell you what a kindness it would be to Squire and —and to me.'

Where now was his prudent resolve to keep clear of the siren? He was caught in the whirlpool into which George had been sucked, when his friend could not find words strong enough to denounce his folly and feebleness. We need not say that he chose Wednesday because the MacGucken was to spend that day with her sister.

'I should like very much indeed to go,' said Mabel, accepting the invitation as heartily as it was given, and attributing the hospitable change in Lawley to his friendship for George. 'Perhaps, Mr. Lawley, if it wouldn't be too much trouble,' she continued hesitatingly, 'you would kindly write and ask my aunt, and say

you would be glad to see me too, if she would take me.'

The girl blushed at the insincerity of the *ruse* she was suggesting. She had an unfeminine abhorrence of artifice. Lawley, affecting not to see the stratagem of which she seemed ashamed, said lightly, 'Of course I shall write to Miss Masters,' and hurried on to add, 'Do you remember, when Squire wished me to ask you, and how I hesitated then to take this chance of a visit from you? What a Goth you must have thought me! The truth is, Miss Masters, I have a servant—the nurse of my hospital—who is a brute to visitors, and I daren't ask you when she's at home. She will be away on Wednesday, thank heaven!'

Here was a new light let in on Lawley's character! Afraid of his servant! Probably, thought Mabel, he endured her for the children's sake, because she was so excellent a nurse. Anyhow, both his fear of her and his endurance of her went much to his credit with Mabel, as ladies will well imagine.

'You're afraid of her, Mr. Lawley?' her voice expressing the surprise and amusement she felt at the revelation.

‘Well, yes; she’s like fire—a good servant, but a bad master. As a servant she is everything that could be wished, but as a master——’ Here Lawley filled up the aposiopesis with a shrug which spoke volumes.

‘But whose servant is she?’ for it was evident she stood in the opposite relation to Mr. Lawley.

‘She serves tables, so to speak. She is always polishing the furniture. She is a perfect slave to it, and is not happy unless she can see her face in everything.’

‘That’s the vanity of our sex, perhaps, Mr. Lawley. But why don’t you give her notice?’

‘I did, but she wouldn’t take it—for my own sake, she said. She is sent for my good, perhaps,’ said Lawley, so much in the manner of Mr. Meekins condoling with a bereaved parishioner, that Mabel could not help laughing. His confiding his domestic trouble to her made her feel more at home with him than a month’s intimacy would have done. She at first stood in awe of the man whom even her father respected, but his shyness and the deference of his manner to her made him less formidable, and now this confession of his domestic

helplessness brought them closer together. Lawley, on the other hand, was himself surprised by the courage of his confidences. He could never have believed beforehand that he would have ventured to amuse Miss Masters with a picture of the MacGucken, but Mabel's own manner was so frank and confiding as almost to force his confession from him. Having now broken the ice he went on to describe to Mabel, with a dry humour which was irresistible, the sufferings he endured at the hands of his enemy. He had the art of saying preposterous things with the solemnity of a preacher. While his tongue was describing ludicrous situations, or painting humorous pictures, his grave, sallow, thoughtful face never moved a muscle, and his melancholy dark eyes seemed to appeal for sympathy. Mabel—herself in some measure mistress of this manner—appreciated it thoroughly, and of course her appreciation of it made Lawley more pleased with himself and with her. In a word, at this first interview Lawley found Mabel even more fascinating than he feared, while Mabel found Lawley all she expected, which was much. When he rose at last to go, she felt as if she

had known him for years instead of for days, and expressed this feeling in the frank cordiality of her manner.

‘I may tell Squire, then, you’ll come on Wednesday, Miss Masters?’

‘Thank you; I shall be very glad indeed to go if Aunt can take me, and if Mrs. Mac—ah—MacStinger is certain to be away.’

She hesitated over the name in the most natural way in the world, and pronounced it at last as innocently as Lawley himself could have done. The jest, and the manner in which it was uttered, showed the confidential terms on which they had got already.

‘I shall make a note of it, or telegraph if Mrs. MacStinger should change her mind,’ said Lawley laughing, as he took leave.

Miss Masters accepted Mr. Lawley’s invitation, and the MacGucken didn’t change her mind; nevertheless, Squire was to be disappointed, as we shall see.

Mabel and her aunt were due at a ball the next night at the Sugdens’. Mabel, of course, loved dancing, not the less because, as the belle of Wefton, she had all the best partners competing for her hand. Still she was in no mood

to go to a ball to-night, and would have escaped this if her aunt had allowed her. But her aunt would not allow her. The old lady loved to show herself, feeling with Waller that—

Small is the worth
Of beauty from the light retired.

And as she could not well go without Mabel, she would not hear of her niece moping at home.

Mabel, then, went to the ball bent on being bored and miserable, and as such expectations, like dreams, go generally by contraries, she was shocked to find herself disgracefully happy now and then. She was exquisitely dressed, simply and in perfect taste, how, we dare not attempt to describe. It would be ‘murder to dissect’ (as Bob Sagar would have said) a dress which, like a bird’s plumage, seemed a part of the wearer ; and since dress adds as much to the beauty of a girl as sun and shadow to that of a landscape, she looked her loveliest to-night. Of course, therefore, she was beset by a crowd of pretenders to her hand for every dance, and had her card filled five minutes after her appearance.

Mr. Clarence Pickles’ name figured upon it

for two dances. He would have put himself down for five if he could have got them, for Mr. Pickles' passion has grown since we last saw Mabel and him together. They had met two or three times in the interval, and each time Mr. Pickles' passion had 'advanced by leaps and bounds,' till to-night he was as much in love as it was possible for him to be with anyone besides himself. Mabel too, to-night, was less ungracious to him than usual. She was even almost gracious to him, because she set down to his influence the promise made by his father to provide for Squire.

Therefore she gave him two dances, even waltzes, which he would ask for, though he could no more dance a waltz than a kangaroo. Having no ear, he plunged about to his own time, but took care to mark it for his partner by treading if possible on her foot at each critical third step of the waltz. Mabel's one absorbing aim in dancing with him was to make this impossible by going delicately, like Agag, and not allowing her feet to straggle outside her own lines.

Her feet beneath her petticoat
Like little mice stole in and out,
As if they feared being trapped.

But do what she would she was sure to get so bruised and torn, that after two or three rounds she was fain to give up the struggle and be bored by Mr. Pickles' conversation. Mr. Pickles was at no loss to interpret Miss Masters' preference of a *tête-à-tête* with him even to the rapture of being whirled about in his arms. The girl, like every other girl in Wefton, would catch him if she could. Indeed she had already caught him. Only the fear of his father prevented his surrendering to her before now; but now even the fear of his father was forgotten at sight of her beauty, and at sight also—for this weighed as much with him—of others' admiration of her beauty.

When, then, Mabel after supper had given up an attempt to waltz with him after the third round of the second dance, he was moved to say to her with much expression in his eye-glass, 'It's very hot.'

'Very,' replied Mabel absently, thinking of her absent George. Misfortune brings friends to remembrance.

'So glad you came.' This, from Mr. Pickles, was almost equivalent to a proposal.

'Of course I came. Wefton isn't so gay

that I could afford to refuse an invitation to a ball, Mr. Pickles.'

'Beastly place!' with ineffable disdain.

'Well, I like it; but I know no better, you see.' Mabel was giving about a third of her mind and attention to her partner, the rest was wandering far out to sea. Mr. Pickles construed her pre-occupation as the nervousness of a girl expecting a proposal. Even he himself felt nervous.

'It's awfully warm,' he said, after a pause for thought of which this remark was the outcome.

'Very.'

'Let's go into the conservatory. It's cooler there.'

The conservatory opened into the ball-room, and was provided with lights and seats. Mabel mechanically took his arm, with a dim idea of where she was going. Mr. Pickles brought her to the most secluded corner of the conservatory, invited her to sit, and sat down beside her. He was ill at ease. He was as deep in love as it was possible for him to be, but he could not keep down the thought that he was about to make a confounded ass and

sacrifice of himself. Meantime the scent and sight of flowers recalled Mabel to herself. She loved flowers and was delighted with the conservatory—a very fine one—and much more interested in its contents than in the conversation of Mr. Pickles.

‘What a lovely camellia !’ she exclaimed, starting up to examine it.

To understand Mr. Pickles’ next move we must remember that he imagined that no girl in Wefton, and least of all a penniless girl, could have any higher hope of happiness than the possession of his hand, not merely and not chiefly because he was heir to 10,000*l.* a year, but also and especially because he was such a perfect gentleman. He saw thoroughly through all Mabel’s coquettishness, that is, her snubs, rebuffs, and sarcasms (such of them as he understood), and knew perfectly well that they were meant to pique and stimulate him and give the zest of difficulty to his suit. He saw also through her graciousness to-night, which was simply an invitation to the proposal she held to be ripe; and through her distract manner, which was the natural and becoming expression of her nervousness on the brink of

this proposal. All these ‘tricks of the trade,’ as he called them to his confidant, Bob Bateson, in the supper-room, Mr. Pickles saw through and forgave, in part because they were ‘tricks of the trade,’ that is common to all women, and in part because Mabel was so beautiful. In fact Mr. Pickles judged Mabel as he judged the barmaid at the ‘Bell,’ or any other woman, for he was of the opinion—

Nothing's new beside their faces,
Every woman is the same.

Having, then, this perfect knowledge of Mabel's mind and motives, he proceeded to propose for her in his own simple and direct way. As she bent over the camellia he sprang up, put his arm round her, and kissed her without a word. Mabel turned upon him as much astounded as enraged.

‘Mr. Pickles! ’

Her look and tone utterly disconcerted even Mr. Pickles.

‘I—I mean to marry you,’ he gasped, confused.

‘You—mean—to marry me? You! ’

No number of notes of admiration could adequately convey the withering scorn she put

into the words. Mr. Pickles looked as confounded as the fisherman in the ‘Arabian Nights’ before the towering genie he had evoked, and was infinitely relieved when Mabel turned her back upon him and marched, stately as a queen, out of the conservatory.

At its door she met her aunt.

‘I was just coming to look for you, dear.’

‘And I was coming to look for you, Aunt. We must go home at once.’

‘They’ve told you, then?’

‘Told me? No; what?’ asked Mabel anxiously, thinking at once of her father.

‘Your father has been taken very ill; fallen in a fit, I believe; and the doctor has sent for us. I think he must be dying by their sending for us,’ said the considerate creature. Mabel stood for a moment, white, with parted lips, stock-still, as if turned to marble, then she hurried through the ball-room, looking neither to the right or left, out into the corridor, down the stairs to the hall door.

‘Mabel,’ shrieked her aunt after her from the stairhead, ‘you’ve forgotten your cloak.’

‘Please come, Aunt,’ cried the girl, with a piteous ring in her voice.

As a footman opened the door, Miss Tubbs, to whom Miss Masters had told the news (as indeed she had told it to everyone she met), and who had seen the misery in Mabel's face, hurried forward, threw her own cloak round the girl's shoulders and kissed her. Miss Tubbs hardly knew Mabel, but the generalissimo had a kind heart, and liked withal to do a striking thing. The delay gave Miss Masters time to come up with her niece and they got together into the doctor's carriage. Miss Masters talked the whole way home very feelingly of her share in the trouble ; how sickness in a house unnerved and prostrated her, and what sufferings she endured while staying with her sister's sick household in Louth. Mabel sat deaf and silent, stooping to look out now and then to see how near home they had got. If her father had spoiled her, would she have been more miserable ? Human nature, and especially woman's nature, values even kindness, as it values gold, from its rarity.

CHAPTER XXVII.

RUIN.

WHILE Mabel was dressing for the ball her father was lying struck down by paralysis within a few feet of her. He had lain for hours thus before he was discovered, and would have lain so all night—such was the wholesome dread of intrusion with which he had inspired everyone—if Jane had not ventured in to announce a visitor on urgent business. But the urgent business of the visitor had already been anticipated by a telegram found clenched in Colonel Masters' hand. It told him in twenty words that he was ruined. The Caledonian Bank (Unlimited) had failed for a few millions, with assets of a few thousands, and therefore six of its shares, held by Colonel Masters, would suck with them into the vortex of ruin every farthing he possessed. Yet the Caledonian Bank had been a promising and pious specula-

tion. Its directors were elders of the straitest of all Christian sects—the Scottish Kirk. Its chairman, Gilead Gedge, would not take cream in his tea on the Monday morning, fearing lest the cow from which it came had been milked on the Sabbath day.

Mr. Gilead Gedge had started many speculations, which had failed, as they deserved to fail, through one defect in their foundations—they had not been based upon religion. The Caledonian Bank (Unlimited) being, however, so based, was a magnificent success. It numbered its shareholders by thousands, its capital by millions. Robert Macaire says to his accomplice Bertrand, in one of M. Philipon's caricatures, ‘*Mon ami, le temps de la commandite va passer, mais les badauds ne passeront pas. Occupons-nous de ce qui est éternel. Si nous fassions une religion?*’ Other companies having failed with Mr. Gilead Gedge also, he started the Caledonian Bank on these two sound principles: ‘*Les badauds ne passeront pas,*’ and ‘*Occupons-nous de ce qui est éternel.*’ The bank was to be a strictly religious concern; its directors elders, its shareholders, as far as possible, ministers of religion, or at least those

whom the Christian religion binds us specially to consider—the widow and the fatherless and him that hath no helper. To these it gave bread with a full and free hand until unfortunately it failed. But it did fail disastrously—for the shareholder at least—and involved in it the fortunes of our heroine.

When Mabel reached home the doctor assured her that her father was in no immediate danger, though mind, memory, speech, and motion were gone. She sat by his bedside for the rest of the night in her ball-dress, with a shawl thrown over it, and the ghastly contrast between her face and her costume struck even the unimaginative Jane. The discreet Jane had her faults and her policeman, but had also the merit—if a thing so inevitable can be considered a merit—of worshipping Mabel. She sat, like a dog, on a stool at her mistress's feet for the rest of the night, all Mabel's remonstrances notwithstanding, and in the morning under the pretence of taking off the incongruous ball clothes before the doctor came, bullied and wheedled her mistress into bed for a couple of hours. However, Mabel was up again and dressed when the doctor did come, and heard

his opinion from his own lips. He pronounced her father, to her immense relief, better and likely to live, but certain to have his powers of thought, speech, and motion woefully impaired. It was, in fact, a bad case of paralysis, that true 'nightmare life in death.' For the rest of his days his body just held together the wrecks and ruins of his mind, and his life, like the light in a Roman vault, shone only to show the pitiable decay of mortality. Absolute death would have been better, but Mabel was thankful for the little life left. By unremitting devotion to him now she might atone for the past unkindness and neglect of which she accused herself—of course without the least cause, for her father had repulsed every timid advance she had made.

As for Miss Masters, her brother's seizure bore hardly upon her. Sickness in a house discomposed and upset her. She was often forgotten in the fuss, and sometimes had no one to talk to or even to attend upon her. Her breakfast was cold often, and often late, and was taken up to her by Jane instead of by Mabel. Indeed she saw nothing of Mabel for three days, since the girl was always in her

father's room, and her aunt was too sensitive to face the sight of sickness. Miss Masters, therefore, felt her brother's illness very acutely, and spoke of it with deep feeling to anyone who would listen to her. It weighed upon her so much that she began to think herself in the way, especially when she heard from Mr. Broughton, her brother's solicitor, that every penny Colonel Masters had in the world would be swallowed up in the huge hole Mr. Gedge had been digging out for years. So long as her brother was well off she had, of course, no compunction about living in his house at his expense. But it was very different now. All he and Mabel would have to live on would be Mabel's seventy pounds a year. She couldn't think, therefore, of putting them to the expense of her support any longer. She would go to Bath and try to live upon the pittance of a hundred and fifty pounds a year, which was all she had in the world. Thus, as she observed to Mr. Broughton, the kindest thing she could do would be to relieve the ruined household of the expense of her support. When Mr. Broughton had taken his leave, wondering not a little at the old lady's fortitude and philosophy,

Miss Masters, in the first flush of her delight at her extraordinary consideration, and also, it must be said, at the hope of an immediate escape from an uncomfortable house, sent for Mabel forthwith, and told her of her generous resolution. Then Mabel heard for the first time of their ruin.

‘All!’ she exclaimed aghast.

‘All but your seventy pounds, my dear,’ replied her aunt with a confirmatory nod.

Seventy pounds! Mabel had found it little enough for the little she had to do with it, but to support an invalid father upon it!

‘But, Aunt,’ cried Mabel, with a sudden hope in her voice, ‘you have something?’

‘Yes, dear; only a hundred and fifty pounds a year, but I hope to make it do with management. Don’t fret about me, child; I shall get on somehow.’

Mabel was silent for a moment, wondering if she understood her aunt. No, she couldn’t have understood her.

‘You mean we should *all* remove to Bath, Aunt? Is it a cheap place?’

‘Cheap! No, indeed, dear. I shall find

it hard enough to make ends meet on my little pittance. But seventy pounds a year would be nothing there.'

'If we lived together, Aunt,' said the girl in a voice that trembled a little, 'we should have two hundred and twenty pounds, besides what I might earn by teaching.'

What! Another governess in the family, and going out from the house! She could never hold up her head again. To say nothing of being saddled with a helpless invalid.

'If you're bent on being a governess, Mabel, you had much better stay in the North—much better. The salary is better, and—and the position too. And as for taking charge of your poor dear father in your absence, I'm not equal to it; I'm not, indeed.'

'I might be a daily governess,' urged Mabel, meaning, of course, that then she might take the burden of attendance on her father off her aunt's shoulders.

'So you might, my dear,' replied her aunt, nodding approvingly. She considered that she had finally disposed of Mabel's preposterous plan of their all living together, and was only too glad to approve of any alternative. 'So

you might, my dear, and in Wefton, too, where you have plenty of friends.'

Wefton was a long way from Bath, you see. Mabel was again silent for a few moments. She knew now that she had not misunderstood her aunt at first. She was to be left to struggle with the world alone. Her heart sank at the prospect, but there was no help for it. As for a hope of help from her aunt, it was plain now that there was no room in Miss Masters' thoughts or plans for anyone in the world but herself.

'When did you think of going, Aunt?' asked Mabel, in a cold, proud voice.

'I don't think it's right, my dear, to stay a day longer than I can help. You have so much expense now—doctors, and nurses, and one thing and another—that I don't like saddling myself upon you any longer. I should go to-day if my things were packed,' with an air of extraordinary generosity, 'but to-morrow, my dear, I shall be off your hands.' Miss Masters seemed to expect some acknowledgment of her generous consideration from her niece, but Mabel was most ungraciously and ungratefully silent.

‘I suppose that was all you wanted me for, Aunt,’ she said wearily as she rose to return to her father.

‘That was all, dear, except that I was going to ask you to spare Jane for a couple of hours to pack for me.’

‘I shall send her at once, Aunt.’

‘Thank you, my dear.’

After Mabel had gone, and before her aunt had got together her paintings and other belongings which adorned the drawing-room, Mr. Archer Lawley was announced. Miss Masters explained at once her raid on the glories of the drawing-room by telling Mr. Lawley the whole story from first to last of her brother’s seizure and utter ruin, and of her own thoughtful consideration in disburdening the impoverished household of herself. Mr. Lawley had already heard (in Mabel’s letter of apology for not keeping her engagement to lunch with him) of Colonel Masters’ dangerous illness, but of his ruin he had not heard. Miss Masters’ confidences thereabout to a comparative stranger were not in the best taste, but she had really talked herself into a belief in her own considerateness, and was as proud of it as

everyone is of a feat in a field wholly foreign to him. Lawley, however, knew her well enough to feel sure she was ratting. He made no reply whatever to her confidences, but started up and walked backwards and forwards in a quick, disturbed way, as if he was in his own room. In fact, he forgot Miss Masters for the moment altogether. Miss Masters was not a person to allow herself to be altogether forgotten, so she brought Mr. Lawley to with the shock of a startling announcement.

‘I’m going to-morrow, Mr. Lawley, and I don’t suppose I shall ever come back to Wefton again.’

Lawley was brought to. He stopped opposite Miss Masters and held out his hand.

‘Good-bye, Miss Masters. It’s *very* kind of you to leave them now.’

‘I couldn’t bear to be a burden to them, you know,’ she replied with absolute self-complacency.

Lawley walked slowly and meditatively downstairs, opened the hall door, shut it, stood for some seconds on the steps, and then turned and rang the bell again. Jane looked rather surprised at this quick succession of visits.

‘ Could I see Miss Mabel Masters for a moment ? ’

He looked so troubled that Jane had no hesitation in saying : ‘ Yes, sir. Please come into this room, sir,’ showing him into the nursery.

Lawley having asked before by mistake for Miss Masters, Jane did not think it necessary to intrude into the sick room and mention his visit to Mabel, who knew nothing of it therefore. Now, however, when Jane told her of both visits, she felt a relief which would have been the sweetest flattery to Lawley, if he had known of it. She had only just heard of their ruin and was still stunned by this second blow, and in her utter friendlessness and sore need of advice Mr. Lawley seemed heaven-sent.

‘ How do you do, Mr. Lawley ? ’ in a voice that failed to sound cheerful.

Lawley said nothing, or rather spoke only through the yearning and wistful expression in his dark eyes, holding her hand in his for a moment after he had shaken it. It will be seen that his courage had risen astonishingly, but trouble is a great leveller, and Mabel didn’t

someway seem so far off from him now. The depth of silent sympathy expressed in his face was too much for Mabel, after four days and nights of misery, during which she had hardly slept or eaten, and could not shed a tear. Nothing melts a heart thus ice-locked like sympathy. It is deep calling unto deep; and Mabel, do what she would, could not keep back now the tears she could not weep before. She turned away to the window, ashamed of her breakdown, and wept silently for a few moments. Lawley, also silent and reverent as if her grief hallowed the room, leaned his elbow on the mantelpiece, looking for a moment with a profound depth of sadness in his eyes at the girlish figure averted from him, and then he turned to steal from the room and from the house, to come again to-morrow. He knew that Mabel had broken down unexpectedly and in spite of a desperate effort to control herself, and he felt it profanity to intrude on so sacred a sorrow. Mabel, hearing his hand upon the lock, turned quickly and cried anxiously: 'Don't go, Mr. Lawley. I want to speak to you. I want to ask your advice. I've nobody——. You'll wonder that I come

to you ; but you're always kind to those in trouble, Mr. Lawley, so I've a claim on you, like Squire,' with a wan smile.

‘If you *would* let me be of use to you ?’ pleaded Lawley with perfect sincerity, reversing the situation and becoming the suppliant. Indeed, there was a depth of earnestness in his tone and look which surprised and touched Mabel greatly, and which drew her towards him as towards a brother.

‘You’re so generous,’ she exclaimed, surprised out of this direct compliment, and looking up to him with a glow of admiration in her face. Poor Lawley felt rebuked by the undeserved praise. He generous ! What would she or George think of his generosity if they saw his heart. ‘But,’ she hurried on to add, seeing his embarrassment, and attributing it to his dislike of compliment, ‘you don’t like being thanked even.’ She paused for a moment and then resumed. ‘I have just heard of another trouble. My father had some shares in that bank which broke. But you have heard of this from my aunt?’ reading Lawley’s face with her usual quickness.

‘Yes ; she told me,’ with a ring of bitter

contempt in his voice, which Mabel was at no loss to interpret.

‘Do we lose everything?’

‘I’m afraid so.’

‘I thought perhaps aunt might have misunderstood Mr. Broughton.’

‘I’m afraid everything goes—at least, everything of your father’s.’

‘There’s very little else,’ she said, looking with a thoughtful and troubled face into the fireplace, while her hands lay listlessly together in her lap. ‘I do so wish I had been brought up to do anything. I’m only fit to be a nurse. I’m too ignorant for a governess. I don’t know anything of drawing, or music, or German, or Italian,’ looking up into Lawley’s face with childish simplicity and sincerity.

‘No; you’re not fit to be a governess,’ said Lawley, starting up brusquely and fiddling impatiently with one chimney ornament after another. ‘You don’t know everything and nothing. Besides, you’re not fit in any way—not in any way,’ his face and voice suddenly softening, as he reiterated the words, into the most unexpected expression of tenderness, like that of a mother soothing a sick child. Mabel,

who was drinking in the words of the oracle with absolute faith, could not, with all her modesty, help seeing that he thought her much above and not below the position, and that he had an interest in her of which she never dreamed.

‘But what can I do? I must do something, Mr. Lawley.’

‘Miss Masters, if you were my sister, and had to make your way in the world, I should say, “Take a school.” Not a young ladies’ school, mind. A national school. You would be absolutely independent and would do an incalculable amount of good.’ A national schoolmistress, like Miss Pochin!

‘A national school!’ faltered Mabel.

‘Yes; a national school. There is no other position that I know of in which a woman can do so much good and be so independent. You’d never be happy in any lower position—certainly not as a governess or as the mistress of a young ladies’ seminary.’

Here was a revolutionary reversal of civilised ideas! A governess or the mistress of a seminary for young ladies ranked below the mistress of a national school! Mr. Lawley was a Radical in many points, and in some an

eccentric Radical. He judged of a position by the influence it would have on oneself and on others, rather than by its respectability in the eyes of Mrs. Grundy. Mabel was silent for a moment, taking in this new idea and looking at it from all points. The more she thought of it, the less she disliked it. It was certainly a position in which she could do most good to those who needed it most, with the least loss of independence and self-respect. She would have to do also with the children of the poor towards whom she had always felt a yearning. But, was she qualified? You might be a governess, or the mistress of a seminary for young ladies without knowing anything, but you must know something and pass some examinations to be a national schoolmistress.

‘But you must know something?’

‘Yes; you must know something; but nothing that *you* don’t know already, or couldn’t master in three months.’

Mabel was again silent for a little.

‘And there’s a long apprenticeship, isn’t there?’

‘No; not necessarily. If you like you can act as assistant mistress for six months and then pass. Or you can give a lesson before the

Inspector and qualify to sit on his certificate.' Lawley hid his heart as he could under a business-like manner, but the impression which Mabel, looking up suddenly, caught in his face, belied his brusqueness.

'Do you remember my saying, Mr. Lawley, that I couldn't think of coming to you except on crutches?' she said, answering the more than kindly and compassionate look she caught in his face with a smile of inexpressible sweetness. 'I didn't know then how soon I should have to come to you on crutches—or,' she added hesitatingly and diffidently, 'that you would have been like a brother to me.'

'I've been like a brute to you!' broke in Lawley, with a most unusual impulsiveness; 'I've spoken of you—*you* becoming a national schoolmistress almost as if it was your natural position. Whereas—' Here he pulled himself up with an effort and a jerk, and, diving his clutched hands deep into his trousers' pockets, turned his back upon her, and walked to the window. The most subtle and exquisite flattery could not have said so much as this blunt outbreak and break-off and impulsive turning of his back upon her. This Mr. Lawley,

the cynic and misogynist! 'Still,' he continued, after a pause, facing her, but replying rather to his own thoughts, 'still, its no degradation even to you. You will be absolutely independent. You'll have only your own conscience to fear and serve. And there's no end to the good you can do where it's most wanted—to the children of the poor. School is their one chance, and our one chance with them. And the influence of such a teacher as you would change their whole lives and last their lives, and be passed on still to their children. A few such teachers in each of our large towns,' he exclaimed enthusiastically, 'would do more good than all the churches.' Lawley was not merely justifying his advice, but airing a crotchet of his own. He had an inordinate idea of the importance and influence of elementary teachers, who had to do with plastic material, and who were, he held, the real clergy of the poor. And the position itself he considered intrinsically higher than that of the highest paid or placed governess. Still, though he held it the best position open to Mabel, his heart bled for her as he looked at the worn and wan face, and thought of the troubles that had come so

thick upon her, and of the dreary, if divine, drudgery before her. ‘At worst,’ he continued, still answering his own thoughts, ‘it is the less of two evils. It’s at least better than being a governess.’

‘You’ve convinced me that the position is above me and not below me,’ said Mabel with one of her old smiles; ‘but I think of Miss Pochin and take courage.’

‘I spoke of the position, not as Miss Pochin has made it, but as you will make it.’

‘I only wish I could.’

‘You will,’ said Lawley dogmatically; ‘that is, if you’ve made up your mind to try it at all.’

‘Yes, I’ve made up my mind; or, you’ve made it up for me, Mr. Lawley. I don’t know how to thank you, but you would need no thanks if you knew what strength and courage you have given me. I cannot tell you how lost and lonely I felt just before you came—before you were sent to me,’ in a low and reverent voice. ‘But everything looks different now. You’ll come again soon?’

‘I shall come to-morrow,’ he said, holding the little hand longingly in his own, and

looking wistfully into the trustful and thankful face upturned to his. ‘Good-bye.’

Mabel hurried upstairs to thank God for so speedy an answer to her prayers, while Lawley set off to seek Her Majesty’s Inspector of Schools.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

MR. WOODWARD, H.M. Inspector of Schools for the Wefton district, was an old college friend of Archer Lawley's. He had beaten Lawley in every Academic battle; for being plodding and painstaking, and doing almost as much in a month as Lawley did in a week, and working more months than Lawley worked weeks, he won every race by a neck. For all that he looked up to Lawley as a man who, though he did and was nothing, might have been and done anything, while Lawley respected in him the slow but sure intellect, the cautious judgment, and the conscientious industry in which he was consciously so deficient himself. So the two kept up still their old friendship, all the firmer,—like a mortise and tenon joint —for the one being the complement of the other.

To Mr. Woodward, then, Lawley at once repaired upon quitting the Grange, knowing this to be the hour in which he was most likely to be at home. He was not disappointed. Mr. Woodward was at home, and disengaged, and only too glad to take the walk to which Lawley invited him, expecting, of course, a battle on any or all of the subjects in constant dispute between them. What was his amazement to hear Lawley speak only, and speak highly, of a woman ! Lawley thought himself justified under the circumstances in confiding to his old friend Mabel's engagement to Kneeshaw, their separation and its cause, as well as the hopeless illness and ruin of her father. He then described Mabel in such terms of praise as took his friend's breath away (for Lawley's contempt of the sex was one of the subjects on which they habitually fought), and wound up with her intention, on his advice, to take a national school. Mr. Woodward was not in the least surprised at Lawley's advice, for he knew, and even shared his friend's ideas on this point ; but he was very much surprised by Miss Masters' acceptance of it. She must be an extraordinary girl, he thought, of whom Lawley

can so speak, and who had the sense to take such unpalatable advice.

‘Now I’ll tell you what you must do, Woodward,’ said Lawley impetuously. ‘You must see Miss Masters when she is able to see you, and you must tell her all about the examination. Perhaps she’ll let you prepare her for it,’ he interrupted himself to suggest, as if H.M. Inspector must think it a priceless privilege to coach Miss Masters.

‘I don’t think I could find the time,’ objected Mr. Woodward.

‘You’ll find the time when you know her,’ rejoined Lawley decisively.

He was right. Next day Lawley called on Mabel according to promise, and arranged for her interview with Mr. Woodward on the day but one after. On that day Mr. Woodward, expecting great things, called, and was not disappointed. He lingered out the interview as long as possible, explained everything in the minutest detail, and at its close begged as a favour to be allowed to help Miss Masters in her studies. The offer was all but irresistible to Mabel, who had the deepest distrust of her own powers, but she could not be so unreasonable as to accept it.

Mr. Woodward, seeing her reluctance was due only to consideration for him, pressed the offer upon her so cordially that she was forced to accept it. She would not hear, however, of his coming to the Grange, but insisted, and at last carried her point, that she should go to his house. So it was finally arranged that she should go once a week to Mr Woodward's, an arrangement of which Mrs. Woodward was pleased to approve. Indeed, that impulsive and rather fussy matron, hearing from her husband the story of Mabel's troubles, called and made friends with her, and always took care to be out driving casually in a cab, and to pick up Mabel quite incidentally on the day when she was due at her house. She was jealous indeed of the length of lesson her husband gave Mabel, but jealous only because it left herself so little time for a chat with her charming *protégée*. For Mrs. Woodward with all her kindness of heart, was a patronising little person, and would always treat Mabel—who at ten had more sense than Mrs. Woodward had now—as a child. If Mrs. Woodward had known Mabel a fortnight ago, she would have formed the precisely opposite impression of her; but by some curious

confusion of thought, the helplessness of misfortune was confounded with the helplessness of childhood in her mind, an impression much assisted by the fact of Mabel's taking lessons like a school-girl. Mabel accepted the assigned position gravely and gracefully, and found some relief from the set grey sadness of her life in those days in playing at being a child in Mrs. Woodward's company.

‘Well, my dear, how have you done to-day?’ the little woman would ask when Mabel came out of the awful study of H.M. Inspector.

‘I’ve been a good girl, Mrs. Woodward,’ Mabel would answer, resisting the temptation to say ‘a dood dirl,’ but looking as if she should have said it, that is, with the wide intense eyes and grave nod of a little child. She would have made a consummate actress. Mrs. Woodward, who was constantly zigzagging like a butterfly about the room, making for one thing, and then, midway, checking herself and darting aside for another, would nod her head approvingly.

‘That’s right. Now sit down and have a cup of tea.’ She would always have cake for Mabel—all children liked cake—and would set

her chair at the proper distance from the table, and all but help her on to it. When Mabel sat down, Mrs. Woodward, standing by her, could reach her head, and would smooth her hair caressingly with her hand before she sat down herself.

‘ You’ll find the tables hard. *I* did, when I was at school, and the geography, especially the definitions, but we used to christen the girls by them and remember them in that way. *I* still write to Lydia Parker ‘ My dear Isty,’ short for Isthmus, you know ; she had such a long thin waist. It wasn’t right, my dear,’ fearing Mabel might take to such demoralising mnemonics, ‘ but we don’t always do what is right.’

‘ I know all the definitions, Mrs. Woodward,’ said Mabel, with some natural triumph in her tone and look.

‘ Do you, my dear ? Mr. Woodward says you’re very clever. He says—but it wouldn’t do to tell you all he says about you ; it might make you vain. And cleverness isn’t everything. *I* wasn’t thought clever at school.’

Mabel had to look amazed in common politeness.

‘ No, my dear, I wasn’t,’ nodding her head

positively, as asseverating an incredible statement. ‘They used to call me “the Claimant,” not only because I was stout, but because of my “impositions.” I had ever such a lot of impositions to do—you can’t think. That’s why I’m so good at history. I think I have written out the names and dates of the kings and queens of England five hundred times at least. Every girl ought to know history, the names and dates are so important. You know history, my dear?’

‘A little.’

‘I should study history if I were you,’ speaking very earnestly, and *ex cathedrâ*, as an expert. ‘If you wrote out the names and dates of the sovereigns of England so many times every day you would soon get to know it.’

‘And the battles?’ suggested Mabel. She would take herself to task afterwards for ingratitude, pertness, flippancy, &c., but the temptation at the time to play the child was irresistible.

‘I don’t think I had the names and dates of the battles to write out,’ replied Mrs. Woodward thoughtfully, ‘but the genealogies I had.

I remember when Mr. Tinling, the clergyman, examined us in history, I was the only one in the class that could give the genealogy of Edward III., and how he claimed the throne of France. I forget how now. Through another mother, I think,' reflectively.

‘How many had he, Mrs. Woodward?’ asked Mabel, with perfect composure.

‘I forget it all, now, my dear. Not as many as .Henry VIII.—those were wives, though. No; I can’t remember, now,’ shaking her head impatiently. ‘But I got the prize then for history. I have it still, beautifully bound and full of dates—“Mauder’s Menagerie”—a very clever book.’

Mabel had to keep silence, to keep her countenance at this happy confusion of Maunders of Menagerie fame with his namesake of the ‘Treasury,’ and at the still happier description of that brilliant and original work as ‘a very clever book.’

‘But you haven’t eaten your cake,’ continued Mrs. Woodward, who could not endure a moment’s silence.

‘I don’t want any, thank you, Mrs. Woodward.’

‘Not cake? You shall have some jam, then,’ in a tone not unlike that of a soothing nurse, ‘It shall have its jam, then.’

‘But I haven’t brought my pinafore, Mrs. Woodward.’

‘Your “Pinafore”? We have a copy of it, my dear, if you’d like to play for me. Do I should like very much to hear you; I should, indeed.’

Mrs. Woodward was under the impression that Mabel, like any other child, was eager to show off her latest accomplishment or acquirement.

‘No, thank you, Mrs. Woodward. I didn’t mean the opera, and I can’t play it. Besides, I must get home, as I expect a friend this evening. I feel your kindness very much,’ said Mabel, taking and holding the little woman’s hand. The words were not much, but the tone and look were as tender music to them, and gave them expression. Mabel, as usual, towards the end of her visit was filled with compunction for what she felt to be ungrateful ridicule of her hostess, though in truth it would have been hard to accept Mrs. Woodward’s grandmotherly patronage seriously.

‘My dear, you deserve kindness,’ raising herself on tip-toe to kiss Mabel and pat her on the cheek. ‘And I’ve got you a little present,’ handing her a small parcel which Mabel had seen her take up and put down again furtively and fidgetingly half a dozen times. Mabel half expected it to be a doll, but it turned out to be a very pretty little housewife, with the one disadvantage that the thimble &c. were too small for even Mabel’s fingers. ‘You mustn’t look at it till you get home. I hope you’ll learn to use it, my dear.’

When Mabel had thanked her, and was leaving the room, Mrs. Woodward first trotted to the bell to ring for the servant to show the visitor out, and then hurried after her to show her out herself, chattering the while. She was ‘left speaking,’ in fact, like the House of Commons, and even when Mabel had got almost to the bottom of the dozen steep steps that led up to the hall-door, Mrs. Woodward called after her, ‘My dear !’

Mabel was back in a moment.

‘You needn’t have come back, my dear. I was only going to tell you to be careful in going down the steps. They are so steep, and

it was only the other day I saw in the paper that a poor old woman in Manchester had slipped on a piece of orange-peel on the pavement and broke all her eggs and her ankles, and was taken to the Infirmary. You can't be too careful, my dear.'

Certainly Mrs. Woodward was mistress of the art, which is described by no less venerable and ponderous an authority than Hierocles as 'getting on horseback in a ship'—a happy example of fuss.

The friend whom Mabel was at last allowed to hurry home to see was Mr. Robert Sagar. Mabel had written to him in the first days of her trouble, but got no answer, and knew, therefore, that her note had not reached him, rightly conjecturing that he had left London. He had left London to roam here and there over the Continent, as chance, or a chance companion, might lead him, and found Mabel's letter on his return. He telegraphed at once to explain his silence, and to promise to be with her the same evening. It was a generous promise. Mr. Sagar completely conquered and suppressed himself in making it, for he imagined Miss Masters still at the Grange. Mabel,

having nothing good to say of that estimable lady, had made no mention of her in her letter, and Mr. Sagar therefore was almost as much disquieted about his own prospects as about Mabel's, when he had time to think things over in the train. What about 'Rebecca'? How was he to face, or rather flee her? He had almost put in the telegram an announcement of his marriage, accounting for his absence from town by his honeymoon, only he couldn't bring himself to tell a lie, or at least, *that* lie, to Mabel. He thought with much perturbation and perspiration of the case of his friend Dick Burkitt, an old Indian and an old bachelor like himself, and like him, too, retired, who was advised to marry and even whom to marry—a Manchester maiden with a lac of rupees to her dower. Dick ran down to inspect what Sir Anthony Absolute calls 'the live stock on the estate,' and promised to report to Bob the results of his inspection of the heiress. Accordingly, two days after Dick's departure Bob received, not a letter, but this terse telegram :

'She's as old as the devil.'

Two months after he saw in the *Times* the announcement of his friend's marriage to

this very maiden. Still, there's the lac of rupees thought Bob. If his friend had married the devil, at least it was a consolation to remember Milton's assurance,

That riches grow in hell.

But his shamefaced friend, being met by him shortly after, and congratulated upon the lac of rupees, replied with laconic bitterness :

‘A plentiful lack.’

‘What! Hadn’t she a fortune?’

‘A thousand pounds, Bob, in Consols, all told. Thirty pounds a year; cigar money if I smoked. But I’ve given up smoking since I got married,’ continued Dick dismally, ‘so I may call it sixty pounds a year.’

‘You’ll be giving up living next. There’s a deal to be saved in that way, my boy;’ for certainly Dick seemed to have suicide in his eye. ‘Look here, old fellow,’ continued Bob, linking his arm sympathetically in Dick’s. ‘we’ve known each other a matter of twenty years, so you’ll not think me intruding on you in your trouble if I give you a word of advice. Ease the boiler a bit; let it off through the whistle; it’ll do you good.’

Then Bob heard the tale which now flung him into a perspiration. For it seems his friend's case was precisely analogous to his own. It was the old lady's niece who was the heiress, as Dick found a fortnight after he had telegraphed to Bob, and before he had fully committed himself; yet he married the aunt. How, he couldn't say. She had misunderstood something he said as a proposal, and he couldn't get out of it somehow. He did buzz about a bit and shake the web, but it was no use.

'And after all,' concluded Dick, with a sigh like a sob, 'it might have been worse, Bob. She's religious, and has the devil's own temper, but she makes first-rate curries.'

Bob was so touched by the frankness of his friend's confidences, and so struck by the astonishing similarity of the case even in detail to his own, that he made in turn a clean breast of his miraculous escape from Rebecca.

'By George! the same trick. The confidence trick!' cried his astonished friend. 'I'm hanged if they're not taught it at school. Those girls' schools are the mischief, Bob. But look here, my boy, do you remember how we

bagged “Auld Cloots” (‘Auld Cloots’ was a man-eating tiger). ‘We tied a calf to a tree as a bait, and potted Clootie in act to spring on it. Keep clear of the calf, my boy, or it’s all up with you.’

Bob was not well pleased to hear Mabel so described, but after all, Dick’s being a sin of ignorance, as he didn’t know Mabel, was venial, not mortal, and he was any way pardonable as being pitiable. Besides, the advice was certainly sound, and it was this sound advice that now recurred to him and disquieted him. But though Mr. Sagar was not in some respects a man of the most refined feelings, as might be inferred from his intimacy and this conversation with Mr. Burkitt, he was essentially generous, and even chivalrous, and did not repent of going upon this forlorn hope to the relief of Mabel.

Having reached Wefton and recruited himself at the ‘Queen’ with some dinner, he took a cab to the Grange, but did not pay the driver until he had satisfied himself that Mabel was at home. He daren’t risk walking back in case Rebecca was at large.

‘Is Miss Masters at home, Jane?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘I mean Miss Mabel;’ standing like a Janus with one side face towards the open door, and the other towards the cab, for she might be upon him at any moment, and he must pretend not to see her.

‘Didn’t you know, sir? The old lady’s gone, sir,’ said the discreet Jane, with a guarded grin. She had made merry many a time over Mr. Sagar’s headlong flight, the cause of which she had penetrated through a keyhole.

‘Gone! To London?’ cried Bob with a new alarm in his voice.

‘No, sir. To Bath, sir.’

Bob looked doubtfully at the Discreet, suspecting her of wit. Living much in hotels, he had a vast intimacy with pert barmaids.

‘Ordered there?’ he asked jocosely, to draw forth the lurking jest, if there was one. But no, there wasn’t. The Discreet looked by no means humorous, but wroth rather.

‘No, sir; because her breakfast was late, sir, since Master was took,’ venomously; for Jane had had most to do with and most to hear and to bear about this grievance.

‘ You took it late to her?’ asked Bob in wild spirits.

‘ Yes, sir,’ rather doggedly.

Bob could have kissed her, and would, too, but for the cabman. He couldn’t, however, resist chucking her under the chin with one hand, and presenting her with half-a-crown with the other.

‘ Bedad, if you’d only kept her dinner late, you might have sent her to Jericho.’

Jane didn’t understand this as the superlative of ‘going to Bath,’ but she quite understood Mr. Sagar’s high spirits, his caress, and above all his half-crown. It wasn’t the first half-crown she had had from Mr. Sagar, nor the first caress either. Mr. Sagar, having made the cabman rejoice with him by a bounteous over-payment, followed Jane up to the dismantled drawing-room. It looked like a plucked peacock, as of course Miss Masters had not left a single feather behind. Mr. Sagar dwelt on every token of her fair absence with a lover-like delight. The old lady, we need not say, had taken care to let him know that all the glories whose absence he gloated over were the work of her own hands. He was not, however,

left long to these sentimental musings, as Mabel at once hurried in to see him.

‘I knew you would come,’ with such a bright welcome in her face and outstretched hands, that if Bob hadn’t been in love with her he must have kissed her.

‘Come! I should have come from India. How’s your father?’

‘He’s as well as he ever will be, Mr. Sagar, the doctor thinks. He’s as helpless as a little child,’ and far more fractious, she might have added, for she was tried, and tried sorely, by his ceaseless petulance, and frequent, violent, and causeless outbursts of passion. Bob looked sadly at the sad face.

‘I suppose it was this bank?’

‘Brought it on? Yes, I think so. The telegram telling him of the failure was found clenched in his hand.’

‘It’s utter ruin?’

‘Everything goes except seventy pounds a year. But I’m going to make my fortune, Mr. Sagar,’ with a smile, but not without trepidation. She could defy Grundy, Roxby & Co.’s disapproval, but not Mr. Sagar’s.

‘You?’

‘Why not? We have made our way into the professions, you know,’ with an assumption of sauciness.

‘A doctor,’ thought Bob, and his heart fainted within him.

‘Not a doctor,’ said Mabel, answering what she knew would be his first thought. ‘A schoolmistress.’

‘Hwhat!’ like a shot from a gun, and in a brogue as broad as the Shannon at Kerry Head. His one idea of a schoolmistress was Miss McCormack of Ennis—a griffin. His lively imagination tried in vain to picture Mabel ‘old and formal, fitted to this petty part.’

‘A national schoolmistress,’ Mabel hastened to add, to get it over.

‘Who’s put this into your head, Mabel?’ in a lamentable voice.

‘Mr. Lawley thought it would be pleasanter than being a governess, and I quite agree with him. Don’t say anything against it, Mr. Sagar,’ pleaded Mabel persuasively; ‘I’ve set my heart on it.’

As, indeed, she had. She had got it into her wise head that it was a kind of missionary

work to which she was called. Bob, too, thought it was some idea of this kind, put into her head by a pet parson, which made her so bent upon it.

‘Hang those parsons,’ he muttered bitterly. ‘They think no one can get to heaven without peas in his shoes.’ But aloud to Mabel he said, with a sudden change to tenderness in his voice and face, ‘Mabel, your mother left you to me on her death-bed, and now that your poor father is helpless, I claim the right to take care of you. You’re my ward, dear,’ he said, taking her hand in one of his while his thumb moved back and forward over it caressingly. He forgot for the moment even his love in his pity. ‘I cannot let you do this—this degrading thing.’

‘I’m so sorry you think it degrading,’ she said humbly. Mr. Sagar’s tenderness disarmed her of argument. ‘I don’t think it’s more degrading, or so degrading, as being a governess.’

‘But why should you be a teacher at all, Mabel? Why shouldn’t you let me take care of you, and be a father to you? It was your mother’s wish, dear—her dying wish.’

‘Father!’ It was the hardest word in the

world for poor Bob to speak, but it was spoken bravely and sincerely.

‘Dear Mr. Sagar, I cannot say what I feel about your great goodness to me. But I do feel it. I do with all my heart. You will be to me, I know, dear friend, all that my mother asked you to be in that letter ; but I was a child when she wrote it—I could do nothing for myself. Now I am a woman, and I can work. Do you think my mother would have liked me to be a burden to you? Do you think I should be happy if I was a burden even to you? You are so generous, Mr. Sagar, that you can understand—no one could understand better than you—how much happier I should be earning my own bread. Don’t you feel that I should?’ with an appealing look, and laying an appealing hand on his.

‘You should think something of the happiness you would give me, Mabel,’ said Bob, evading an answer. ‘I don’t know anything,’ he added, with an energy and emphasis that trebled the meaning of the words, ‘which would make me so happy as to be of use to you.’

‘Of use to me? Didn’t I write to you at

once when I heard of our ruin? Didn't I bring you all the way from London? Do you think I shall spare you in future, Mr. Sagar? You'll find I shall give you trouble enough to satisfy even you,' she said, with a smile that shone through tears, for she was touched exceedingly, as well she might, by the depth and tenderness of affection shown in Mr. Sagar's manner, more than in his words. Bob, however, still held out against the Quixotic national schoolmistress scheme, and suggested her taking charge of children of Indian parents, of whom he could have procured her half-a-dozen, but Mabel at last coaxed him into a sullen assent to her pet plan.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ADVISERS.

MISS TUBBS had an Irish preference for generosity to justice. She would much rather impose than discharge an obligation, and would give most to those with least claim upon her. If Mark, Maggot, Tubby, and Weenums had been her own children, they would not have been spoiled but bullied rather. Mr. Gant's chief claim in her eyes to S. George's was that he had no claim ; he was her creature. She would not have given a penny towards Mr. Kneeshaw's presentation if it had been got up in the ordinary way ; but she gave 10*l.* for the pleasure of having it wholly in her own hands. Her delight in doing *outré* and startling things was delight in the sense of power which she felt in defying Mrs. Grundy with impunity, and to this delight in the sense of power was due much of her high-handed generosity.

Having conquered S. George's Church—patrons, parson, choir, and Sunday School—she turned her arms against the Day School, and put to rout its master and mistress after two or three sharply-fought battles. Both at last surrendered at discretion, and allowed Miss Tubbs to revolutionise the schools—very much to their advantage it must be said—and all would have gone smoothly henceforward, if it was not for the righteous zeal of Mr. Gant. Having a ritualistic abhorrence of irreverence to holy things, he nagged at the schoolmistress, while still smarting from her defeat, for the disrespect shown him by the girls in her charge. These girls were taught to curtsey with their arms looped to their shoulders like the handles of a sugar-basin, yet many of them, on meeting their priest, if they were carrying anything, instead of putting it down and presenting arms, would honour him only with what Dr. Primrose calls ‘a mutilated curtsey,’ while some passed him without any salute. A slight like this passed upon a priest was no light thing, and Mr. Gant could not overlook it. Whenever it occurred—and it occurred almost daily—he took Miss Garthwaite querulously to task for

neglect of the religious training of the children as exemplified by their irreverence towards their priest. Now Mr. Gant's nagging was maddening. He was always so full of himself that he never had a thought to spare to the feelings of others—least of all when his own self-importance was touched—and poor Miss Garthwaite had at last to give in and give notice. It was the last straw on the overburdened camel. Then, too late, Miss Tubbs intervened. She had no notion of allowing Miss Garthwaite to be bullied by anyone but herself, and when Mr. Gant came to announce her notice and his version of its cause, he got a sharp and sound scolding.

‘I shall have to take the school into my own hands altogether,’ said the generalissimo in conclusion. And so she did. She invited Mr. Randal, Mr. Woodward’s colleague (she did not know Mr. Woodward) to dinner, told him that she meant to make the school the first in his district, and asked him to recommend a first-class mistress. Mr. Randal knew of no such mistress disengaged in his district, but promised to make inquiries, and the result of his inquiries was the recommendation of Mabel. He enclosed to Miss Tubbs Mr. Woodward’s letter to himself

in answer to his inquiries after such a mistress ; and in this letter Mabel was described in terms that seemed extraordinary to Mr. Randal, with his knowledge of his colleague's phlegm. Miss Tubbs had no difficulty in identifying Mabel with the belle of the Sugdens' ball, as her address was given in Mr. Woodward's note, and it was the address of the young lady from whom she had so graceful a letter of thanks in returning the cloak Miss Tubbs had thrown over her shoulders that night. Miss Tubbs had heard of Colonel Masters' illness and ruin, and had given a thought of passing pity at the time to the young girl forced to face and fight the world alone at a moment's warning, and now this pity was warmed into active benevolence. It was just such a case as Miss Tubbs delighted to take up—striking, interesting, pathetic, with no special claim upon her. She must certainly take this friendless girl under her protection. She a national schoolmistress ! beyond all comparison the loveliest and most ladylike girl in Wefton ! Miss Tubbs wouldn't hear of such a thing. Why not be a governess, be *her* governess, and have the privilege of teaching Maggot, Tubby and Weenums—the very thing for her

and for the children too. She mustn't lose another moment in making the girl happy with this offer. Accordingly the bell was rung, the carriage ordered, and Miss Tubbs was at the Grange an hour after the receipt of Mr. Randal's letter. Having inquired after Colonel Masters, and condoled with Mabel upon the trouble and anxiety she had gone through, she broached her business with less than her usual abruptness.

‘I have come, too, on business, Miss Masters—on a business I should not have ventured to come upon if I had not the warrant of two of Her Majesty's Inspectors. I can hardly believe even them, that you mean to become a national schoolmistress.’

‘I mean to try, Miss Tubbs. I'm not sure that I shall pass.’

‘Pass! You should read what Mr. Woodward writes about you. He says you should have been professor of English literature at Girton. Why throw yourself away as a national schoolmistress? If you like teaching, why not be a governess? I am selfishly interested in persuading you, Miss Masters, as I should like to secure you for myself—for my

niece and her two little brothers—really charming children. You'd find it quite a pleasure to teach them.'

Miss Tubbs felt she was making a generous offer graciously. She always did generous things graciously.

'It is really very good of you, Miss Tubbs, and I should have been glad to accept your kind offer if I had not made up my mind against being a governess. You see my father is very helpless, and I couldn't think of leaving him.'

'But you might be a non-resident governess. I can guarantee you as many pupils as you choose to undertake.'

'I should like being a schoolmistress better, I think, Miss Tubbs.'

'You don't know what you're undertaking, Miss Masters,' positively with a very decided nod. 'You'll find the drudgery disgusting. It's not like having to do with gentlefolks' children, you know,'—contrasting in her own mind the sweet reasonableness of Mark, Maggot, &c. with the lawless brutality of the children of the poor.

'I've a fancy to try it, Miss Tubbs. I

think I shall be more independent. Besides, I don't know the things a governess is expected to teach—music, German, and Italian.'

'Don't you?' cried Miss Tubbs eagerly, her idea of Mabel's qualifications as a governess being raised immensely. 'Give my children a trial, Miss Masters. Try them for a few months. I have no fear at all that you'll regret it. One so seldom meets with a governess who doesn't profess to teach everything.'

'I should be found out in a day,' answered Mabel, smiling at Miss Tubbs' eagerness and its cause. 'So it wouldn't do to profess it. If anything could tempt me, though, to be a governess, your kind offer would, Miss Tubbs; but I feel that I should be more happy and at home as a national schoolmistress.' Mabel of course was perfectly sincere in her acknowledgment of Miss Tubbs' offer, as she had not the happiness of knowing Maggot and her hopeful brothers.

'Well, Miss Masters, if you're bent upon it, I've nothing more to say—nothing more to say, that is, against your choice. But if you *will* be a national schoolmistress, I should be so glad if you would accept S. George's Girls' School.'

S. George's! Three months ago Mabel was to have been the wife of its Vicar! This, though, was not the thought in her mind on Miss Tubbs' mention of the school. 'I should be under Mr. Gant,' she reflected. She knew from Mr. Lawley that as schoolmistress of a Church of England school she would be much at the mercy of the Vicar—of Mr. Gant! She had often charitably pleaded Mr. Gant's cause with George, whose contempt for his fellow curate was unfathomable, but no charity could be blind to his silliness and his insensibility to everyone's claims and feelings but his own.

'Mr. Gant's school!' exclaimed Mabel, surprised out of the exclamation. That the surprise was no pleasant one, was plainly expressed in her face.

'You know Mr. Gant,' said Miss Tubbs with a smile, and with a suspicion that her *protégé* had, perhaps, been refused by Mabel. 'But you'll have nothing to do with him, Miss Masters. He has promised me not to meddle with the Day Schools in future. I shall take charge of them myself,' said the generalissimo decisively.

Mabel could not help the thought that as

the mistress of a school in Miss Tubbs' charge, she might not altogether realise her ideal of independence. 'But I cannot sit for my certificate for six weeks yet, Miss Tubbs.'

'We shouldn't want you before then, probably ; or, if we should, we could easily make shift for a while, till you were ready.'

'If you could kindly leave the offer open for a day or two, Miss Tubbs, I shall think over it and write to you.'

'Couldn't you spare me an evening ? If you could dine with us any evening this week or next, we could talk matters over together. You see I don't want you to escape me. Would Thursday do ? or Monday next ?'

It was impossible to refuse this invitation, though Mabel felt that her acceptance of it was a step towards the acceptance of the school.

'Thank you ; I shall be glad to come on Monday next. I must thank you very much for the kind interest you have shown in me, Miss Tubbs,' as that lady rose to go.

'I assure you it's all selfish, Miss Masters. If you read Mr. Woodward's letter about you, you would understand it all. I didn't lose a

moment after I read it in trying to secure you. I only hope I have succeeded.'

Miss Tubbs went away more favourably impressed than ever with Mabel, and more delighted with herself and her scheme of taking her up. She would take care that the girl did not lose caste through her eccentric choice of a calling, for she would have her at her house and at her parties, and keep her still, where she had every claim of birth, beauty, and bearing to be, in the first society of Wefton. This was precisely the kind of enterprise in which Miss Tubbs took most delight, and in which, too, she was sure of success, for she ruled even the fashionable world of Wefton with a rod of iron. Upon leaving the Grange, she drove at once to the office of Mr. Mills, and Mr. Gant's colleague in the management of the Day Schools, Mr. Gledhill, and put the case clearly before him. She explained Mabel's circumstances, expatiated on her qualifications, and produced Mr. Woodward's tribute to them. With Mr. Woodward's testimony Mr. Gledhill was as much struck as Mr. Randal had been, for as a manager he had to do with that phlegmatic Inspector, and knew how he

weighed his words and grudged his praise. Miss Tubbs, therefore, had no difficulty in persuading Mr. Gledhill—a very kindhearted man, who was much moved by the story of Mabel's troubles—to offer her the school at a salary of 150*l.*—that is, half as much again as Miss Garthwaite had.

‘We shall more than recover it in the grant,’ pleaded Miss Tubbs, ‘for Mr. Woodward is sure to give her a flaming report.’ This consideration was not without its weight with Mr. Gledhill, but he did not need it to convince him that he was doing a wise, as well as a kind thing, in securing the services of a lady of whom even Mr. Woodward spoke so highly.

Meantime Mabel wrote to Mr. Lawley, asking his advice upon Miss Tubbs’ offer, and was of course answered by that gentleman in person as soon as possible after the letter reached him the next morning. Lawley had visited Mabel twice to advise with her since last we saw them together, and each time grew more desperately and miserably in love. Indeed, if he had not been already in love, Mabel’s implicit dependence upon him and recurring recourse to him for advice would have been

irresistible ; as it was, they heaped fuel on a furious flame. The strength of love is as the strength of the man in love, and Lawley's heart was like a fortress, hard to win, but once won and garrisoned in force, impregnable. His love for Mabel had grown to be part, and the better part, of his life. He could not work, or write, or eat, or sleep, for thinking of her—of how she looked and spoke the last time he saw her ; of what she would look and say at their next meeting ; while mixed like poison with these sweet reveries was the thought of the hopelessness and of the treachery of his passion. It is only just to him to say that he would have had the will and the wisdom to wrench himself free when first he felt his bonds, if it was not for Mabel's helpless dependence upon him. When she wrote and asked his advice as to her next step in a path on which he had himself set her, what could he do ? Write ? She asked him to call when next in Wefton ; and besides, a dozen letters could not express or explain adequately what she asked about. No ; it was Mabel's helplessness, not his weakness, which drew him to the Grange. He was not a weak man by any means—a still, strong

man rather, who could 'bide the beating of so strong a passion' without a cry. If he could not strangle it he could imprison it, deep down where no one, and Mabel least of all, should hear or see it. But we know that suppressed suffering, like suppressed gout, is the most agonising. Wise is the warning of Pythagoras—*Mὴ εσθίειν καρδίαν*,—

The grief that does not speak
Whispers the o'er-fraught heart, and bids it break.

And Archer Lawley suffered such mental tortures as only a lonely, strong, and silent man can know. In Mabel's presence most of all and hardest of all he had to hide his heart, and he hid it so that sometimes she imagined she had outworn even his kindness ; but then again, looking up suddenly, she would surprise a yearning expression in the deep dark eyes fixed on her, which she construed as the earnest pity of a man who could not, unmoved, see even a little child suffer.

Not long, then, after he had received Mabel's letter, Lawley was walking up and down the grim drawing-room of the gynecium, where she soon joined him.

‘I’m such a trouble to you,’ she said, with unmistakeable sincerity as they shook hands.

‘It would be a trouble to me if you thought so, Miss Masters,’ he answered with a sincerity equally unmistakeable. ‘You could not have done me a greater kindness than to make use of me.’

The words seemed cold and of course to Lawley, compared with his longing to be allowed to do or suffer anything for her; but to Mabel they sounded gracious.

‘I have loaded you with kindness, then, Mr. Lawley, and have plenty still in store for you,’ looking up with a grateful smile into his wistful face. ‘Well, what do you think of Miss Tubbs’ offer?’

‘Offer? Order. I know Miss Tubbs’ —glad to put on his cynical mask—his usual disguise.

‘Indeed, no; she put it in the most flattering way, as a favour. She was rather asking than offering. She even wished me to be her governess.’

‘What! to those children?’

‘To her nieces and nephews; she said they were charming children.’

Lawley was speechless for a moment, and said then drily—

‘ You’d a narrow escape. But I don’t know that the school will be much better. It’s Mr. Gant’s school.’

‘ No ; it’s Miss Tubbs’ school, Mr. Lawley ; Mr. Gant is not to be allowed to enter it. At least he has given her a promise not to meddle with it. Don’t you think I might take it on that condition ? ’

‘ He’ll not keep it,’ said Lawley decidedly. He felt that the inducement to that gentleman to meddle with a school of which Mabel was mistress would be irresistible. ‘ I should like you to be under a gentleman’—a biting speech that lost none of its bitterness in the short and sharp way in which he uttered it.

‘ I think I shall be under a lady altogether, Mr. Lawley. I’m sure Mr. Gant *daren’t* disobey Miss Tubbs.’

‘ It would be flying in the face of Providence, you think. Certainly if anyone can keep Mr. Gant in order it is Miss Tubbs. But who’s to keep Miss Tubbs in order ? ’

‘ Miss Tubbs likes her own way, but she likes being kind, too, and I think I’d as soon

be under her as under any other vicar here. Besides, Mr. Lawley, I have another and very strong reason for accepting Miss Tubbs' offer. I put it last like a lady's postscript, but it's my real reason, and has converted me to the amiable views of Miss Tubbs and even of Mr. Gant. The salary is enormous—150*l.* a year! And I don't think it's charity either,' she continued hesitatingly. 'I think it's the ordinary salary. At least the offer does not come from Miss Tubbs, but from Mr. Gledhill, one of the managers, and is made in a very business-like way, you see.'

Lawley took the letter and read it without having his conviction shaken that it was inspired by Miss Tubbs, of whom he came therefore to think kindly.

‘“A thousand pounds! Thou hast touched me nearly,”’ quoted Lawley, and then added—‘ You've made your mind up to accept it.’

‘Indeed I have not, Mr. Lawley. I have made up my mind to do as you tell me.’

‘I should say, take it, if I was sure of Mr. Gant.’

He writhed mentally at the thought of the insolent patronage, or still more insolent atten-

tions, with which Mr. Gant was likely to favour Mabel.

‘I am sure of Miss Tubbs,’ replied Mabel confidently. ‘She spoke as if she had Mr. Gant in complete control, and she’s not likely to let anyone bully me but herself, if she can help it.’

‘She’s pretty sure to bully you?’

‘A little ; but it would be absurd to mind being bullied by Miss Tubbs. It’s the common lot, you know ; and I should feel as the poor people say when they’re down in fever—“No one can stand agen it.”’

‘But you needn’t put yourself in the way of infection.’

““A thousand pounds!”’ echoing Lawley’s quotation.

Lawley did not return her smile. He sat silent and gloomy. He felt sick of the light and unconcerned tone he had affected up to this, when he thought of such a girl having to sell herself into such a slavery. He sunk his hands, after his inelegant fashion, deep in his trousers’ pockets, and sat glowering at Mabel abstractedly, as at an insoluble problem. Presently the penetrating look in his eyes soft-

ened into tenderness, as sunlight softens slowly to twilight.

‘I still think I was right,’ answering his own thoughts. ‘You’ll forget the drudgery in the good you are doing.’

‘Of course you were right, if you mean in your advice to me, Mr. Lawley. There’s no drudgery in work you can do and have a taste for.’

‘No; I don’t think you’ll find it drudgery. After all, with one’s work, as with one’s clothes, the first thing is the fit. If your work doesn’t fit you you are uncomfortable, no matter how grand it is. *You* don’t care for tinsel, Miss Masters, and I think you could get nothing to fit you better than work amongst the children of the poor. Anyhow, you can try it and see.’

‘I have no doubt at all of its fitting me, if I can only fit it, and Mr. Woodward thinks I shall pass.’

‘Mr. Woodward thinks you could pass for anything you chose.’

‘You should ask him about my arithmetic.’

‘Why, you’ve surprised him most with that. You’ve made such progress with a thing you had so little liking for.’

‘I am quite getting to like it, though. A mother likes most the child that’s most “tewsome,”¹ you know ; and it’s been “tewsome” enough, I can assure you. But Mr. Woodward has been so kind and patient with me ; I wish you would tell him how deeply I feel his kindness. I always mean to say so myself every time I go, but somehow I lose courage when the moment comes, and can only thank him in the coldest way. He is very awful, you know. I suppose one must be awful to get to be Her Majesty’s Inspector of Schools.’

‘He’s very shy, that’s all. He probably thinks you as awful as you think him.’

‘Me !’

‘Your sex. Like the elephant, you don’t know your power, and it’s well for us you don’t’—hiding under these light words a personal application Mabel little suspected. Having now stayed as long as business and courtesy required, he had the resolution to rise to go.

‘Must you go? When your little children

¹ ‘Tewsome,’ Yorkshire for ‘giving plenty of trouble.’ Usually applied to an intractable child.

quit your hospital, have you done with them altogether, Mr. Lawley ? '

‘ When they’re outside my parish ? Yes. I haven’t time to look them up.’

‘ Will you make an exception in favour of me ? ’ looking up pleadingly into his face. ‘ You’ll not give me up altogether when I’m off your hands, will you ? You’ll still come sometimes to see me ? ’

He stood silent for a moment with her hand in his, looking down upon her with a troubled expression Mabel couldn’t interpret.

‘ Yes, I’ll come.’

The words were not gracious, but Mabel read a gracious answer in his manner.

CHAPTER XXX.

SCHOOL.

MABEL passed with flying colours, getting a first-class certificate, and entered at once upon her duties. They were light for the first week, as Miss Garthwaite had taken with her not only all the staff, but nearly all the school. This put Miss Tubbs upon her mettle. She gave out public notice that no child so withdrawn would ever be readmitted, and stuck to it, too, in the teeth of the law. This proclamation put the school at premium, and had no little effect upon the neighbourhood. Again, the districts in which Mabel's name was a household word sent every eligible child. Lastly, Barney McGrath developed extraordinary talents as a 'persuader.' It is hardly too much to say that Barney was as deeply shocked and saddened by Mabel's troubles as Mr. Sagar, or even Mr. Lawley. For the

first fortnight after her father's seizure, he never missed a day in calling to ask after her, and to bring her a few flowers, and sometimes some vegetable delicacy. In the latter case, the discreet Jane was instructed to say nothing of whence it came, lest Mabel might think the present a liberty, and a liberty, too, to which he might seem to have been emboldened by her fallen fortunes. Having made his offering he would retreat precipitately unless Jane had special orders—as she nearly always had—to show him into the 'nursery.' Here Mabel would receive him, and he would show her, if possible, more respect than ever, and speak to her on any subject but that nearest his heart—lest she should be pained or humiliated even by his sympathy. Inborn in these scorned Celts there is a gentlemanly feeling which the pure Saxon acquires only by education. Mabel was profoundly touched by this reverential sympathy, and rewarded it in the way in which she rightly judged he would value most, by confiding to him unreservedly her position, plans, and prospects. When Barney heard she was about to become a national schoolmistress, the fall seemed more shocking to him than to

any other of her friends. He stood speechless before her with wide open eyes and mouth for a moment ; he then dropped his eyes to his fur cap, which he began to smooth mechanically with his right sleeve.

He was quite upset. That his princess should have to support her father by becoming a national schoolmistress like Miss MacNamara ! But it was for the sake of ' the children of the poor.' Of this he felt certain. Such a sacrifice was more easily conceivable by a Catholic with all kinds of sisterhoods at work around him, and was besides suggested to him by Mabel's devotion to the sick children in her neighbourhood. ' God will reward ye, Miss,' he said, with much fervour.

It was vain for Mabel to explain that she ' couldn't help herself ; ' that it was for her own sake, not the children's, that she had chosen to become a national schoolmistress. Nothing could shake Barney's faith in her disinterestedness.

' No ; ye can't help yerself, Miss, and the sun can't help shinin', ' he said, with unshaken certainty of conviction ; ' an' will ye be for takin' any childhre that comes, Miss ? '

‘I shall be only too glad to take all I can get, Barney.’ Barney meditated a minute, fingering the fur cap nervously the while. ‘What is it, Barney?’

‘I was thinkin’, Miss, if I might make so bould as to ax ye to take my two gurls, Norah and Kathleen,’ he said shamefacedly.

‘Barney, if you’ll send me your daughters,’ began Mabel eagerly—she was longing for an opportunity to show her gratitude to Barney for all his devotion—‘but,’ she checked herself to object, ‘What would Father Quin say?’

‘Ah, shure Father Quin hasn’t a bit of religion about him at all at all, Miss.’

‘Religion’ is often used by the Irish as a synonym for ‘bigotry,’ and it was, of course, in this sense that Barney used the word. Mabel, understanding the word in its obsolete sense, was rather astonished at Barney’s encomium upon his priest, which had, however, the intended effect of silencing her scruples.

‘Well, Barney, if you’ll let me have Kathleen and Norah, I shall not forget they’re your daughters,’ with a look which gave the words a

depth of meaning that made Barney more her slave than ever.

Barney's extraordinary infatuation with Mabel did not blind him to the consequences of withdrawing his girls from the Catholic care of Miss MacNamara and transplanting them to what Father Quin, and Molly too, probably would consider a hothouse for Hades; still he resolved to brave his wife's tongue and his priest's frown, and a hotter purgatory in reversion, to give 'his gurls' the benefit of the training of 'a raal lady;' and such a lady! We may as well say here, that as far at least as this world was concerned all his expectations were more than answered. Father Quin and Molly paid him a good deal of purgatory down, and promised him the balance, and a large balance, hereafter. On the other hand, Mabel took such exceeding pains with the two girls (who, to begin with, were far the quickest in her charge), that both became successively monitors, pupil-teachers, assistant mistresses, and eventually mistresses of the best schools in their respective districts. They repaid Mabel with a Celtic devotion almost religious in its reverence and intensity. But to return to Barney. On the day of the

opening of the school under Mabel, he himself led Norah and Kathleen like lambs to the shambles of their souls, and ventured to look in to greet Mabel and see how she fared. There wasn't a score of girls in the schools. His heart was hot within him, and he raged furiously, and not altogether without reason, against the swinishness of the Saxon generally, and of the Weftonians in particular. 'They care for nothing they can't put in their bellies or pockets,' he soliloquised, as he led the 'bashte' from the schooldoor. 'To ate and dhrink and get brass, that's all their business in the worruld. Begor, it's a pig's business, shwillin' and shswallowin' and gettin' fat. And they'll talk of the "low Irish," bad luck to them! I'll be bound a cabbage thinks a rose low because it can't be biled.' Barney had both illustrations before him in his cart, for he was in the transition stage between a greengrocer and a florist, having a very pretty garden of his own now, not far from S. George's, that is, at the best side of Wefton. This garden was the saving of him. If teetotalism made him a gardener, on the other hand gardening kept him teetotal (employing

his vacant hours) and both made him prosperous. He felt that he owed all to Mabel, and burned to pay any part of the debt. He saw a chance of paying a very little of it to day, by going round as a 'persuader' in the disguise of a greengrocer. He had at least one qualification for the post, a thorough knowledge of the Weftonians. Instead, therefore, of urging in Mabel's favour what would have weight with himself, her gentleness, cultivation, and refinement, he simply said nothing of these things, since they cared for none of these things; but invented for her without scruple a qualification to which she had no claim whatever, but which alone would tell with Weftonians. He decided to give her a salary of 300*l.* a year. He would have given her 500*l.* a year, but he feared that salary would have sounded incredible to them, even if ascribed to a pot-house-keeper, so he had to content himself with 200*l.* less. It was a weak point in Barney's character, as in the character of his countrymen generally, that he had little scruple about any lie and no scruple about a beneficent lie. This lie, then, he introduced diplomatically and incidentally here and there

in each street (always choosing a gossip for his confidant), with such effect, that before evening the conversation over every clothes' line was about the new missus of S. George's and her 6*l.* a week of a wage. If Barney could have described Mabel as she was, or even as he imagined her, and if his description had been implicitly accepted, he would have won for her nothing like the respect which his report as to her salary secured. It not only brought children in shoals to the school (all accompanied by their mothers, eager to see a missus possessed of such virtue); but it made them while there as respectful as it is possible for a West Riding child to be.

In fact, Mabel owed the very fair start she made more to Barney's lie than to all other causes put together. Once fairly started, however, she owed her extraordinary success to herself and to an exemplary assistant mistress Mr. Woodward secured for her. 'Anybody can make things, but the real art is to make things make themselves,' says Kingsley; a wise and deep Darwinian saying, which we venture to change and apply to teaching. 'Anybody can teach children, but the real art is to teach

children to teach themselves ; ' and this Mabel attempted with a success which was striking, considering the dense material she had to deal with, and the short time it was in her hands. She taught, and taught her teachers to teach the children rather by head than by heart, making the memory a mere baggage animal to carry food for the intellect on its march. To this end she abolished, as far as practicable, the use of all textbooks ; teaching rules, &c., orally in varied words and ways, that the child's intelligence might not be droned to sleep by a sing-song set of words which lost all meaning through repeated repetition. The system repaid the patience it cost by the interest it excited. It is harder to learn the piano than the barrel-organ, but the piano, when learned, is the more interesting of the two instruments to play.

As for the success of the system it surpassed Miss Tubbs' calculation (based, by the way, on the erroneous supposition that Mr. Woodward would be the Inspector, whereas he was invariably, and for obvious reasons, Mr. Randal). Mabel passed 98 per cent., and earned almost the highest possible grant, and

S. George's Girls' School was singled out in the general report of the Inspector as an example of the perfection to which a national school could be brought.

But her best work was not appreciable by H.M. Inspector. She seemed to put the children through a process analogous to that by which the first millionaire of Westton made his fortune. He succeeded in transforming the coarse refuse of coarse goat's hair into a soft and fine and glossy cloth. Mabel similarly transformed Weston girls. She made them more than decent, even modest, and in many cases really refined. She taught them manners at once respectful and self-respecting ; and, better still, principles which kept alight and alive in the foul air of a factory. To have been brought up in S. George's Girls' School became a certificate of conduct and character, and a certificate which in most cases had no need to be produced, as it expressed itself in the bearing of a girl who had passed through Mabel's hands. As for these girls themselves, they loved her through life with a heartiness and a constancy characteristic of West Riding folk.

In these respects Mabel more than justified Lawley's expectations. Nor was he wrong either as to her liking for the life. No other calling open to women would have so suited her, and, as he truly said, with one's work, as with one's clothes, the first thing is the fit. Neither the work nor the children were interesting in themselves, but she *made* both interesting, and so shared the good she did—for it is, of course, true, not of mercy only, but of all other beneficence—

It is twice blessed;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

Lastly—Miss Tubbs notwithstanding—Mabel was as independent as she cared to be. She was quite right in expecting Miss Tubbs to be as tolerable as any other vicar. Miss Tubbs took to her, first as a *protégée*, but at last as a daughter. She got so to love her that a day must not pass without her coming to the school, or Mabel going to 'The Elms.' She got so to love her, indeed, that at last she would allow her to correct Mark and Maggot. Mark, we may say in passing, kissed the rod, was consumed with a secret and absorbing passion for

Mabel, and, to his aunt's amazement, would fetch and carry for her, and follow her about like a dog. There was some soul of goodness in that young ruffian which Mabel distilled.

On the other hand, against all this was to be set Mr. Gant. Of course he didn't keep his promise to hold aloof from the school. How could he? Of course, too, Mabel never complained of his breach of promise to Miss Tubbs. She was the last girl in the world to do anything so undignified. Not that there was much merit in her magnanimity, for she had at her command a manner with which she veiled herself, as with a mosquito curtain, against the petty and pestering impertinences of that gentleman. In the days of her prosperity, Mr. Gant had more than once attempted with her one of his flippant flirtations, but on each occasion he was made to feel foolish—a feeling as rare as it was becoming in him. Now, however, she was at his mercy, and he would be merciful. He would condescend to notice her, patronise her, and even flirt with her, of course in an official fashion, and at a discreet distance. Accordingly, as Barney was leaving, Mr. Gant

was entering the school on the day of Mabel's instalment.

‘How do you do, Miss Masters? Hope you'll like the place, I'm sure.’

‘Yes, I think I shall like it.’

‘You'll not find me hard to please. There are just one or two things I am very particular about, which I'm sure you'll attend to, Miss Masters. There's the manners of the children. Really they don't seem to have any manners—any idea of respect for others, you know.’

It is a strange thing, which is nevertheless attested by the proverbs of all countries, that we are the first and worst to denounce in others the fault to which we are most given ourselves. We not only—

Compound for sins we are inclined to
By damning those we have no mind to,

but we compound for sins we are inclined to by damning those who have a mind to them. ‘Ugh!’ says Death to the man with his throat cut; ‘ugh, how ugly you are!’ The Catalan version of a worldwide proverb.

‘Really, they don't seem to have any manners, any idea of respect for others, you

know,' said Mr. Gant, standing with his hat on before Mabel. 'Not for their priest even! And then, there's another thing I should like set right—those clogs! I wish they could be got not to come to school in clogs. I can hardly hear myself speak sometimes, they make such a clatter.'

'They should be taught to put off their shoes from off their feet in your presence, Vicar,' said Miss Tubbs, who, coming also to see Mabel installed, had the sound of her approach drowned by the clogs in question. Mr. Gant, looking very confused, at once took off his hat and muttered something about wishing to see if Miss Masters wanted anything.

'Remember your bargain, Vicar,' said the generalissimo. 'Miss Masters would accept the school only on the condition that you kept out of it.'

This was strong, and made Mabel uncomfortable; but she little knew Mr. Gant. He was not in the least made uncomfortable, for he was certain that if Mabel said so she didn't mean it, and couldn't mean it, but felt bound to say it either to please Miss Tubbs, or as the protest of a prude. Accordingly Mr. Gant

visited the school whenever he felt secure against surprise by Miss Tubbs, and as Mabel never condescended to complain of his visits, he of course assumed that she enjoyed them. But they were not enjoyable. The stupidity of the man was maddening. It was not the torpid and unobtrusive stupidity of a slug, but the fretful stupidity of a bluebottle, which *will* buzz about you and light upon you with no more idea of its being offensive after the hundredth time you have hit out at it than after the first. As he was practising the art of extempore preaching, he experimented upon the vile bodies of the Sunday and Day Schools. He would get up into the desk in the day school at the hour set apart for religious instruction, and harangue the little children at the highest pitch of his voice, chiefly upon their duty to the Church, whom, as he called it ‘she,’ the children identified with Miss Tubbs; and upon the sin of schism, which they generally understood to be not curtseying to Mr. Gant with their arms looped to their shoulders. Then he would descend from the rostrum and buzz about Mabel, for whom he had two manners, the pompous and the flippant; the latter

specially nauseous, since it was employed for flirtation. These two manners often followed each other, for the pompous was used to cover the retreat of the flippant when Mabel succeeded in putting the latter to flight by such a snub as even he was forced to feel. When, however, as more usually happened, no snub could pierce the triple brass of his armour, Mabel set the children to sing, and the singing of untrained Yorkshire children is like the singing of Scott and his brothers, which called forth the remonstrance of their neighbour, Lady Cumming, ‘ who sent to beg that the boys might not be all flogged precisely at the same hour, as, though she had no doubt the punishment was deserved, the noise was really terrible.’

Whether flippant or pompous, Mr. Gant was offensively patronising for the first fortnight of Mabel’s engagement, but after that he was meeker and more subdued from a characteristic cause. He had succeeded in securing a great local light to preach for his schools, Bishop Bussell, Vicar of Widercross. Dr. Bussell, sometime Bishop of Blefuscu, was one of those devoted and devout missionary prelates now in

England, who, having worked some years in exile, have at last gone home to their reward. No one could know Bishop Bussell for five minutes without learning how his health had been so shattered by hard and heroic work in the deadly climate of Blefuscu as to necessitate his return to England, and his undertaking here the charge of a parish as populous as his late diocese. Yet this sphere is not wide enough for the energy left still unconsumed by the fevers of Blefuscu. Whenever talk is to be reported, there Bishop Bussell is sure to be heard ; and the chances are, that as he was rewarded for quitting his post in Blefuscu by a large living in England, he will be rewarded for the neglect of his living in England by a canonry, deanery, or bishopric. This ubiquitous dignitary Mr. Gant succeeded in netting, and was proud of the not very difficult achievement. He boasted about it to everyone, and not least to Mabel. He even promised her that he would, if possible, bring him to the school and let her see him, and, perhaps, talk to him, or at least hear him talk. Mabel had in her pocket at the time an invitation to meet the great man at dinner at Miss Tubbs', where

he was to stay, of which, of course, she did not think it necessary to tell Mr. Gant. Indeed Miss Tubbs had insisted not only on her accepting the invitation, but on her staying overnight at 'The Elms,' whence she would be driven to school the next morning.

Accordingly, the first thing that struck Mr. Gant's amazed eyes as he entered the drawing-room of 'The Elms' was the spectacle of Bishop Bussell and Miss Masters seated side by side on the sofa, deep in the subject of the fevers of Blefuscu. Even he could not help feeling foolish at the recollection of his patronising and proposterous promise made that morning to treat Miss Masters to a sight of the right reverend prelate. Mabel, however, betrayed no recollection of it in her manner as she shook hands with him with her usual chilling composure, and immediately resumed her conversation with the Bishop. 'Will Miss Tubbs make me take her in to dinner?' was his next mortifying thought. Miss Tubbs, however, was the last person to do anything so cruel. She sent Mabel in with a gentleman—the most perfect gentleman of the clergy of her acquaintance—Archdeacon Rolfe. Mr. Gant's

next subject of meditation was characteristic. 'What would the Bishop and the Archdeacon think if they knew that they were tricked into honouring a national schoolmistress?' But neither was he left long in suspense as to this. When the ladies had withdrawn he overheard Archdeacon Rolfe confiding to Mr. Mills his opinion of Mabel as the most fascinating young lady he had ever had the pleasure of meeting, and his deep sympathy with her in reverses which forced her into the drudgery of teaching a national school. While, next morning, as he was returning from an early wedding, Mr. Gant came upon Miss Masters being handed out of Miss Tubbs' carriage at the school door by Bishop Bussell, who was on his way to a Missionary breakfast. Mr. Gant took the lesson to heart.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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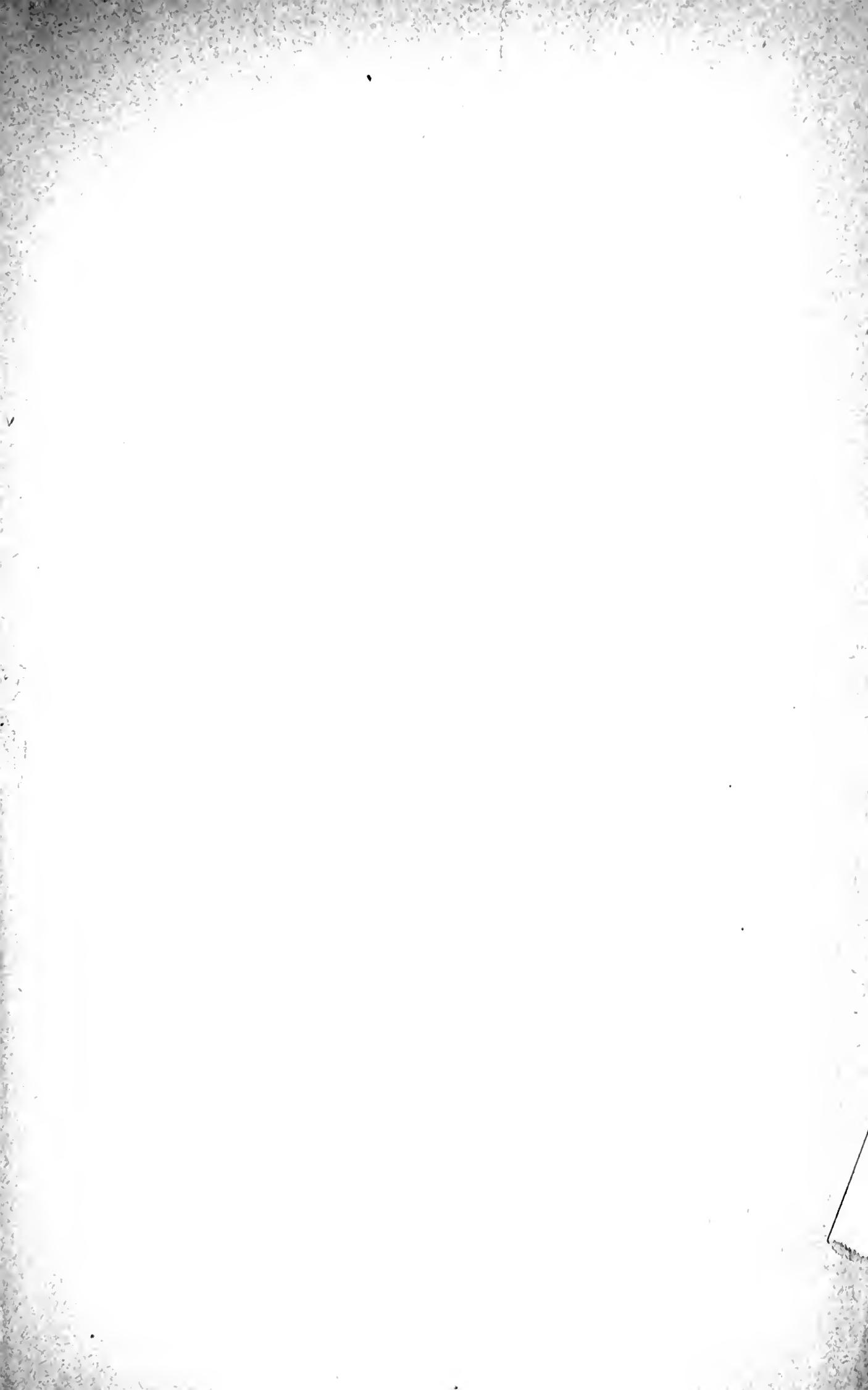
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